Conference of the ESREA Network on Policy Studies in Adult Education

Adult Learning and Education: Widening the scope for action

13-15 May 2026, University of Hamburg, Germany

Book of Abstracts

Andráši, Martin; Poláchova Vašťatková, Jana & Veronika Siegelová	Communities of Practice in Policy Enactment: Insights from the Czech Local Level	1
Arbeiter, Jana	Family Cafés as pioneers: Relearning institutional trust, commitment, and self-efficacy in Adult Education	4
Assinger, Philipp; Barros, Rosanna; Biasin, Chiara & Kopecky, Martin	European mobility and professional development of adult educators: Exploring the enactment of the ERASMUS+ programme across four European countries	6
Babalola, Adejoke Clara & Akinsooto, Tajudeen Ade	Exploring The Dimensions of Informal Learning from Unpaid Work Among Women in Academics in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	10
Babalola, Adejoke Clara & Bojang, Ismaila	Functional Literacy Practices Among Artisans in Obafemi Awolowo University Market in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria	12
Bastianelli, Michela	From Crisis to Renewal: Narrative Coaching and Generative Welfare for a Sociodynamic Approach to Change	14
Boeren, Ellen; Babayigit, Betul Baldan; Clancy, Sharon; Evangelista, Zyra & Holford, John	Evidence-informed policymaking in Adult Learning and Education: insights from interviews with policymakers and stakeholders across the UK and Ireland	17
Boyadjieva, Pepka & Ilieva-Trichkova, Petya	A social justice perspective towards the Skills-First policies in adult learning and education	19
Breton, Hervé; Cavaco, Carmen; Paulos, Catarina & Matsumoto, Dai	Experiential Learning and Non-Formal Knowledge: A Worldwide Perspective	22
Buddeberg, Klaus & Husting, Johanna	Big Money – Small Money. About the relationship between gender and responsibility for important financial decisions	29
Bussi, Margherita	Policy feedback effects on mass politics in adult education: theoretical contribution and research designs	31
Cacchione, Annamaria	Bridging the Literacy Gap: Innovative Approaches to Second Language Learning for Adult Migrants	33
Cavaco, Carmen & Oliveira, Suzanete	Invisible Voices: Narratives of Youth in Institutional Care and Their Learning Processes	35
Cobain, Eve & Jackson, Rebecca	Community Education for Social Transformation in Ireland	36
Desjardins, Richard & Kalenda, Jan	Data Integration and the Future Measurement of Adult Learning Systems: Towards More Comprehensive Comparative Reporting	39

Dutz, Gregor	Exploring Adult Literacy with PIAAC: Practice Engagement and Policy Implications	41
Ehrström, Peter	Raise the voices of the voiceless – A deliberative learning ladder for advancing civic participation	43
Elfert, Maren & Rubenson, Kjell	Tracing the OECD-Canada Relationship in Adult Education and Literacy and the History of IALS	45
Elias, Paula	Reading policy through adult learners’ experiences: Adult literacy policy as a site of class struggle	46
Grotlüschen, Anke; Essert, Saida; Breznau, Nathan & Kulmus, Claudia	International comparison of foundational skills: What do we learn from PIAAC?	48
Heimo, Satu	The Aims, Autonomy and Critical Thinking of Projectified Popular Education in Finland	52
Hwang, SuhYeon & Han, Soonghee	Corporate Employment Structures and the Reproduction of Adult Literacy: A Comparative Analysis of South Korea and Italy	60
Ioannidou, Alexandra & Kaufmann-Kuchta, Katrin	Navigating the Wicked Problem: Adult Learning and Education in German Immigrant Integration Policy	72
Ismail, Salma	Policy provision alone has proved insufficient to ensure social justice for adult education and learners – some reflections from South Africa.	74
Joaquim, Bruno & Barros, Rosanna	Life and Learning Trajectories of Adult Brazilian Immigrants in Portugal: the case of the Qualify Program	76
Kalogerakis, Panagiotis & Goulas, Christos	The emergence of micro-credentials – hopes, hype and … credential inflation: A critical analysis	77
Kukuk, André	Far from what is needed? Political reform strategies versus participants' demands on (higher) continuing education formats	79
Kulmus, Claudia	Ageing in urban areas: age-friendly city policies and local adult education	81
Kyle, Suzanne	Community Education in the Shadow of the Far-Right: Neoliberal Constraints, Misdirected Grievance, and Resources of Hope	83
Larson, Anne & Seidler Cort, Pia	Non-formal education for democracy	102
Liu-Schuppener, Xing; Robak, Steffi & Bai, Bin	Digital Transformation of Higher Continuing Education in China in the Age of Artificial Intelligence	108
Massawe, Consesar & Manninen, Jyri	How have supranational Lifelong Learning policy discourses impacted Tanzanian Adult Education policies?	110

Mayr, Rachel	Populist Right-Wing Influences on Migrant Language Provision: A Literature Review	125
Mazzoli, Erika	Between Local Practices and European Agendas: How CPIA Principals Navigate Adult Education Policy in Italy	127
Mikulec, Borut & Guimarães, Paula	The Erasmus+ programme – impact on participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement in adult education in Portugal and Slovenia	148
Myller, Terhi & Makkonen, Heli	Age-friendly society calls for lifelong learning and critical geragogy- practice-critical findings from Finland from 55+ learners' experiences	150
Norton, Frances-Ann	Challenging exclusionary UK educational policy for over 60s: Developing alternative provision with older people for a Bradford Folk School to aid combating loneliness	164
Opio, Andrew	Uganda's adult education policy agenda 2023/24-2027/28: The coalition, actors' beliefs, motives and influence on practices	180
Park, Soyoun	Hidden Faces of Illiteracy in Korea: A Mixed-Methods Study of Emerging Literacy Groups and Policy Implications	182
Paulos, Catarina	Initial and continuing education of adult educators in Portugal: The impact of public policies on adult education	186
Qiu, Kiki Maleika & Osman, Ali	Teaching under Constraint: Exploring Adult Educators' Pedagogical Practices in Correctional Settings	188
Rambla, Xavier	How do ALE and VET policies construct learning in the EU?	200
Rasmussen, Anette & Andreasen, Karen E.	Widening Women's Scope of Action: Citizenship Education through Home Economics	204
Rasmussen, Palle	Julius Bomholt, Social Democracy and Danish Adult Education	207
Robak, Steffi	Transnational employee councils – qualification requirements in a complex field of action	209
Rubenson, Kjell; Ioannidou, Alexandra; Martin, Andreas & Xu, Gongli	Bounded Agency in Different Regimes: ALE Participation and Skills Proficiency of Immigrants in Canada and Germany	210
Shannon, Denise	Critical conversations about policy: what they tell us about how common-sense policy discourses shape personal and institutional sense-making and the implications of this for the social justice work of adult education	212

Silva, Aline Rocha Santana da	From Inclusion Policy to Emancipatory Practice: The History and Challenges of the Mulheres Mil Programme in Brazil	229
Silva, Aline Rocha Santana da	Trajectories of Black Women from Youth and Adult Education in the World of Work	236
Skowranek, Kristin	Digital Participation in Europe: Comparing Adults with Low Literacy to Adults with Higher Literacy in 9 Countries	243
Smak, Magdalena	Centers of Vocational Excellence – policy tool facilitating reskilling and upskilling.	245
Soltic, Jorie	Lifelong Learning Under Time Pressure: The Temporal Turn as a Lens on European and Flemish Policy Discourses	246
Tutar, Peri; Milana, Marcella & Lasi, Francesca	Negotiating Inclusion: A Case Study of Italy's Migrant Adult Education Policies	248
Yzdizadeh, Zeinab & Manninen, Jyri	Different definitions of citizenship and models of citizenship education – a systematic literature review	250

Communities of Practice in Policy Enactment: Insights from the Czech Local Level

Martin Andráši (Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci)
Jana POLÁCHOVÁ VAŠŤATKOVÁ (Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci)
Veronika Siegelová (Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci)

This paper examines the enactment of Communities of Practice (CoPs) that have emerged within the framework of Local Action Plans for the Development of Education (LAP I–IV) in the highly decentralized Czech educational system. In this system, municipalities serve as school founders and hold governance responsibilities, whereas head teachers are primarily responsible for the quality of education at the local level, for staff recruitment and the overall organisation of the school including teachers´ professional development of teaching and their own professional growth. This study explores the processes through which professional learning emerges in local policy contexts, focusing on the constraints that shape these processes.

The study draws upon situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and contemporary approaches to policy enactment that conceptualize educational policy as a dynamic interaction between national frameworks and local practices (Scanlon, 2023). It also considers relational trust and collaborative professionalism as preconditions for genuine community learning (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Within this framework, LAP initiatives are conceptualized as an external input for stimulating collaboration among schools. Rather than being entirely bottom-up, these processes often reflect a top-down logic, with external actors steering inter-school collaboration that would be unlikely to develop organically. The analysis situates these dynamics within the objectives of national policy strategies promoting distributed leadership and local partnership, in particular the Strategy for Education Policy 2030+ (MEYS, 2020).

The study adopts a qualitative interpretive policy analysis approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018), focusing on how school leaders and local administrators enact education policy through locally situated interpretations and practices. This design facilitates a nuanced understanding of how actors interpret and translate

education policy into their practice. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with LAP coordinators, municipal founders, and school principals, conducted across three LAPs in three administrative regions of the Czech Republic. Interview data were triangulated with documentary analysis of plans and implementation reports from both national and local levels of governance (MEYS, 2016–2023; CSI, 2023, etc.). Inductive thematic analysis of the data highlighted recurring themes pertaining to trust, collaboration, systemic barriers, and leadership learning. Despite national and regional educational policies having established identical external conditions, enactment of CoPs varied, with the intended professional learning communities emerging only in certain cases as the competitive educational environment and perfectionist political tendencies fundamentally limited the essential commitment to exchanging and sharing practice and peer learning. Mutual trust and respect for diversity within unity (through unified planning and procedures) have emerged as key elements of learning-oriented leadership, confirming the findings of Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018).

The Czech cases elaborate the link between externally initiated collaboration and professional learning of schools' key actors. The research also demonstrates the fragility of professional learning communities in the decentralized system. Consequently, sustained policy focus, anchored in a long-term vision, along with targeted support and reflective collaboration designed to promote learning rather than solely enforce accountability, has the potential to consolidate and strengthen these emerging professional communities. By revealing both the potential and the constraints of externally driven cooperation, this study offers insights into how policy frameworks may also unintentionally restrict professional adult learning.

References

CSI. (2023). *Annual report: Quality of education in the Czech Republic 2022/2023.*

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design* (4th ed.). Sage.

Hargreaves, A., & O'Connor, M. T. (2018). *Collaborative professionalism*. Corwin.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning*. Cambridge University Press.

MEYS (2020). *Strategy for the Education Policy of the Czech Republic 2030+.*

Scanlon, D. (2023). A figurational viewpoint of the complexity of policy enactment: curriculum policy and networks. *The Curriculum Journal*, 34(2), 215–230. https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.179

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Family Cafés as pioneers: Relearning institutional trust, commitment, and self-efficacy in Adult Education

Jana Arbeiter
Universität zu Köln, Colgne, Germany

Reaching adults with low literacy skills or limited formal education remains one of the core challenges in adult learning and education (ALE). Although educational needs are evident, willingness to participate in learning programmes often remains low. Research shows that this reluctance is shaped by structural barriers but also by social and psychological factors (Arbeiter 2024). Many adults rely on strong neighbourhood, family, and friendship networks that provide everyday stability and emotional support. While these networks are crucial for coping with daily demands, they may also reduce the perceived need for personal educational development. Low commitment and fatalistic attitudes further contribute to avoidance of formal or binding learning settings, even when learning needs are recognized (Ehmig 2025).

It is widely acknowledged that sustainable ALE must be anchored in local communities to reach these groups more effectively (Mania 2021). It is widely acknowledged that sustainable ALE must be anchored in local communities to reach these groups more effectively (Mania 2021). Reducing learning exclusively to institutions that are traditionally designated for educational purposes is therefore neither sufficient nor appropriate in this context. In this respect, family centres, and particularly *family cafés*, provide a promising model for community based learning. They embed learning within everyday family life, linking social support, childcare, and informal education. Parenthood thus becomes a meaningful entry point to adult learning, connecting personal development with family and community well-being (Ziegeweidt & Schwarz 2025).

This presentation draws on findings from the research project *"Effects of Family Literacy in Family Centres: An Evaluation"*. The project investigates how family literacy programmes—implemented in the form of *family cafés*—are designed, organised, and perceived by practitioners. Family literacy refers to low-threshold, everyday-oriented learning activities aimed at parents with young children. These initiatives strengthen parental competences in areas such as language, health, and upbringing while promoting joint learning experiences between parents and children.

Empirically, the study is based on ten semi-structured interviews with coordinators and educators from family centres. The data were analysed using Kuckartz's qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz 2018), combining inductive and deductive coding. This methodological approach allowed for a systematic examination of professional perspectives on success factors, challenges, and institutional effects of family cafés as adult learning environments.

Preliminary results indicate that family cafés generate primarily institutional effects that, in turn, foster adult learning in indirect yet significant ways. Practitioners describe how cooperation within early-childhood teams becomes more reliable and how communication with parents improves. Regular contact in informal settings strengthens mutual trust and contributes to higher parental participation in everyday educational activities. This ongoing collaboration fosters continuity, stabilises organisational routines, and enhances the institutional culture within kindergartens and family centres.

Thedse developments can be interpreted through three interrelated dimensions:

1. Relearning Institutional Trust,
2. Commitment through Continuity, and
3. Empowerment and Self-Efficacy.

By linking these dimensions with a social-space-oriented perspective, the study shows how family cafés can function as relational gateways between everyday life and adult education. They help educational institutions to anchor learning processes more deeply in the social fabric of communities.

In doing so, the paper contributes to current debates on *widening the scope for action* in ALE, emphasising that rebuilding institutional trust and strengthening participation at the community level are crucial steps toward more inclusive and cohesive adult learning systems.

European mobility and professional development of adult educators: Exploring the enactment of the ERASMUS+ programme across four European countries

Participants of the symposium

- Philipp Assinger, University of Graz, Austria (Chair/Discussant)
- Rosanna Barros, University of the Algarve, Portugal (Presenter 1)
- Chiara Biasin, University of Padua, Italy (Presenter 2)
- Martin Kopecky, Charles University Prague, Czech Republic (Presenter 3)

Keywords

- International comparative adult education
- ERASMUS+ programme
- Policy enactment
- Minor key policy research
- Adult education for active citizenship

Abstract

Adult educators, facilitating *lifelong learning and education* (LLE) in and outside of adult education institutions (e.g., civil society, museums or workplaces), play an important role in the formation and transformation of adults' capacities as well as the communities they live and work in (UIL, 2022). Highly topical issues such as Gen-AI, sustainability including climate change, the rise of autocracy, the spread of disinformation, and enhancing intercultural communication require an effective response from adult educators to strengthen active citizenship for democracy, equality and inclusion (Biesta et al., 2014). Yet, research suggests that adult educators' capacities required in this situation are unevenly developed and that we need a critical and realistic assessment of existing professional development practices (Fejes et al., 2018).

Over the last thirty years, the professional development of adult educators has become an increasingly important topic within international policies as well as academic research (Mikulec, 2019). Adult education is a highly differentiated and complex field which operates in varied ways across regions and nations, but it is also in many senses a profoundly international, and often internationalist, endeavour (Elfert & Rubenson, 2015). This has a significant European dimension and there has been a long history of transnational experiment and exchange between European adult educators (Field & Boeren, 2024). Increasing European integration has deepened this exchange, so we are interested, how far transnational experiment and exchange contribute to the professional development of adult educators, to their agency and capacity to support active citizenship for democracy, equality and inclusion.

The most established policy aimed at fostering European exchange and professional development is the ERASMUS+ programme. It funds various mobility formats, such as study visits, job shadowing, staff training or strategic partnerships. ERASMUS+ is considered to be one of the most effective initiatives the EU has ever designed to promote European integration (Assinger, 2020). Unlike higher education scholarship, where international mobility has been researched thoroughly (Roy et al., 2019), there are few studies on mobility in adult education and

even fewer on such experience of adult educators (Biasin, 2022). While higher education research has drawn an ambivalent picture arguing that mobility does not necessarily have a positive impact on those moving (Mihut, 2024), the few studies on adult education tend to highlight the positive outcomes on the level of adult education professionals.

A recent study illustrates several spheres (Buiskool et al., 2024), where mobility contributes to professional development and practice, including identity (e.g., belonging to a European community), intercultural competences (e.g., sensitivity to different values and experiences), pedagogical and didactical approaches (e.g., identifying learner needs), or organisational management (e.g., involvement in collective action). Studies also indicate that the ERASMUS+ programme contributes to the social mission of adult education counterbalancing the predominance of instrumental vocational training (Mikulec & Kristl, 2025). However, policy research also indicates that the actual impact of European policies on professional development in adult education is at best moderate (Ioannou, 2023). Additionally, in many contexts of adult education there are limited opportunities for European collaboration and professional development for adult educators. This situation perpetuates the cumulative advantage of those already enculturated internationally against those professionals provided with less favourable conditions. Looking at the intersection of macro-level policies and organisational strategies is therefore considered a way to better understand the strengths and the weaknesses of the ERASMUS+ programme and gain insights into how to reach out more effectively to all types of adult education organisations and professionals (Buiskool et al., 2024; Mikulec & Kristl, 2025).

In consideration of this state of knowledge, in an ongoing research collaboration we have been concerned with two overarching questions: What strategies are applied by policymakers and organisational leaders to widen the scope for transnational mobility in their field of practice and for their staff? How do adult educators take up and experience opportunities for transnational mobility provided at national and at organisational level? We approach these questions by means of "policy enactment research in a minor key" (Heimans et al., 2017). After Braun et al. (2011), the concept of policy enactment refers to the interpretation and translation of policies by a diverse range of policy actors, including adult education professionals, across a wide range of levels, organisations, practices and situations. It relativizes the idea of an "linear implementation" (Hay, 2025) of policies and instead refers to the complex and contingent conditions and practices of making policy work. The core message is to take "context seriously" (Braun et al., 2011). Doing this in "minor key" (Heimans et al., 2017) implies the intention to address policy enactment by interacting with those actors grappling with the affordances of the ERASMUS+ programme on the one hand and the affordances of the everyday practice of adult education on the other hand. Minor key policy research also raises the question of how far research is "response-able" (Heimans et al., 2017) to the concerns of the policy actors, the organisational leaders and the adult educators affected by a policy.

Our proposal emerged from that ongoing collaboration. In the symposium, the chair/discussant and each of the presenters will therefore present and discuss research in progress and preliminary results concerning three concrete questions:

1. How does the macro-level context for participation in the ERASMUS+ programme manifest in the four countries of Portugal, Italy, Austria and the Czech Republic?

2. What do we know about programme participation, facilitating or restricting conditions, and about the experiences and perspectives of mobile adult educators in the four countries concerning their professional development for supporting active citizenship?
3. What kind of promoters or obstacles to an increased participation in the ERASMUS+ programme can be expected at the intersection of the macro-level and the meso-level in the four countries?

Because our research concerning these three questions is in progress, in the spirit of learning in a community of practice, the chair/discussant will encourage a lively discussion among the presenters and the audience. The intention is, to build on the presentations and collect and consolidate ideas, experiences, evidence, or theoretical approaches from all participants of the symposium, including the audience, regarding an appropriate research design and challenges to the research design that might come up in developing and conducting an extensive international comparative research project on the topic of European mobility and professional development of adult educators. With such a project, we aim to contribute further insights to the European adult education policy research community with regard to the contribution of European mobility to professional development and to the role of adult educators in strengthening active citizenship for democracy, equality and inclusion.

References

Assinger, P. (2020). *Education and training politics in Europe. A Historical Analysis with Special Emphasis on Adult and Continuing Education*. LIT Verlag.

Biasin, C. (2022). La mobilità transnazionale dei docenti per lo sviluppo professionale continuo. In M. Fiorucci & E. Zizioli (Eds.), *La formazione degli insegnanti: problemi, prospettive e proposte per una scuola di qualità e aperta a tutti e a tutte.* (pp. 507–513). Pensa Multimedia.

Biesta, G., Bie, M. de, & Wildemeersch, D. (2014). *Civic Learning, Democratic Citizenship and the Public Sphere*. Springer Netherlands.

Braun, A., Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Hoskins, K. (2011). Taking context seriously: towards explaining policy enactments in the secondary school. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *32*(4), 585–596.

Buiskool, B.-J., Krichewsky-Wegener, L., & Erckrath, M. (2024). *Transnational analysis of the impact of ERASMUS+ on the Adult Education Sector*. Ockham IPS; Institute for Innovation and Technology; Arteduc.

Elfert, M., & Rubenson, K. (2015). Adult education research: exploring an increasingly fragmented map. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *6*(2), 125–138.

Fejes, A., Dahlstedt, M., Olson, M., & Sandberg, F. (2018). *Adult education and the formation of citizens: A critical interrogation*. Routledge.

Field, J., & Boeren, E. (2024). International and Comparative Perspectives on Adult Education. wbv Publikation.

Hay, A. (2025). What may be: policy enactment in education, a new conceptual framework with actor-network theory. *Journal of Education Policy*, *40*(2), 179–198.

Heimans, S., Singh, P., & Glasswell, K. (2017). Doing education policy enactment research in a minor key. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *38*(2), 185–196.

Ioannou, N. (2023). Professional development of adult educators: A European perspective. *International Review of Education*, *69*(3), 379–399.

Mihut, G. (2024). The world turned upside down: Can international student mobility contribute towards democratization and human development? Evidence from the Eurograduate pilot survey. *Higher Education*, *88*(5), 1753–1772.

Mikulec, B. (2019). Competences of adult education professionals in the European and Slovene context. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, *25*(1), 25–44.

Mikulec, B., & Kristl, N. (2025). The impact of the Erasmus+ programme on adult education in Slovenia. *International Review of Education*, *71*(4), 631–654.

Roy, A., Newman, A., Ellenberger, T., & Pyman, A. (2019). Outcomes of international student mobility programs: a systematic review and agenda for future research. *Studies in Higher Education*, *44*(9), 1630–1644.

UIL. (2022). *Confintea VII Marrakech Framework for Action: Harnessing the transformational power of adult learning and education*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

Exploring The Dimensions of Informal Learning from Unpaid Work Among Women in Academics in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

By

BABALOLA Adejoke Clara (PhD)
jokebablo@gmail.com or acbablo@oauife.edu.ng
+234(0)8034978583
And

AKINSOOTO Tajudeen Ade (PhD)
akinsoototа@oauife.edu.ng or tayoakinsooto@gmail.com

Department of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning
Faculty of Education
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

Abstract

All over the world, women play critical roles in their homes, communities, and places of work. They engage in diverse activities, such as homemaking and food preparation, and carry out vital reproductive functions. They care for children, older persons, the sick, and work to diversify their families' livelihoods. For academic women who teach or do research at the University, in spite of being academics, these women, like women in other spheres, still carry a dual burden that they must pursue both their academic interests while meeting traditional obligations. These women struggle to keep the home and function maximally on their jobs at the same time. Babajide (1995), cited in Adegun (2012), reported that female lecturers are subjected to greater work-related pressures than their male counterparts. In the African patriarchal social system, for example, in a traditional society like Nigeria, the issue of marriage has subjected women to being totally responsible to men. (Ekong 2010). Brockman (2004) argued that unpaid household work, care work, and the knowledge and skills related to such work are also gendered. According to Reskin (2000), cited by Eichler and Matthews (2004), "Unpaid productive work, including that done in the home and volunteer work, tends to be invisible". During the activities already mentioned above, learning takes place, albeit informally. Mejuini (2012) stated that informal learning in Nigeria today has become shadowy, unnamed, and seldom researched, even though it goes on within the formal and non-formal educational institutions in Nigeria. Women's learning in the home and family has received relatively little attention from adult education researchers in Nigeria. A structural feminist perspective suggests that the patriarchal structure of society renders such learning invisible precisely because it is associated with women's work in the private realm of the home, traditionally treated as less significant than work and learning in the public work (Hayes and Flannery 2000). It is on this premise that the researcher is concerned with investigating the informal learning that takes place during the unpaid work of academic women in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Guided by feminist and lifelong learning perspectives, this research explores how these unpaid activities contribute to informal learning that often goes unrecognised but is significant. It specifically looks at what unpaid work entails for women

academics, how cultural practices shape these roles, and the skills, knowledge, and adaptive strategies they develop.
Using a qualitative case study approach, the study purposefully selects twenty female lecturers from various academic ranks in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in Osun state, Nigeria. Data will be gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and analysed via interpretative content analysis. The findings will be reported in the final article. The study emphasises the importance of policies that acknowledge and value the educational aspects of unpaid work as vital to women's lifelong learning and academic achievement.

Key Words: Informal Learning, Unpaid Work, Cultural practices**,** Women, Academics

References

Adegun, O. A. (2012). Gender factor and labour participation among academic staff in tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. *European Journal of Educational Studies, 4*(2), 249-258.

Brockman, J. L. (2004). *Problem solving of machine operators within the context of everyday work: Learning through relationship and community* (Publication No. 1282) [Doctoral dissertation, Unspecified University]. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 65*(4), 1282.

Eichler, M., & Matthews, A. (2004). *What is work? Looking at all work through the lens of unpaid housework.* Retrieved August 20, 2015, from http://www.wallnetwork.ca/events/WhatisWork.pdf

Ekong, E. E. (2010). *Rural sociology.* Uyo, Nigeria: Dove Educational Publishers.

Hayes, E. & Flannery, D. D. *Women as learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Mejiuni, O. (2012). *Women and power: Education, religion and identity.* Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press.

Functional Literacy Practices Among Artisans in Obafemi Awolowo University Market in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

Adejoke Clara BABALOLA (PhD)
acbablo@oauife.edu.ng or jokebablo@gmail.com
Tel: +234 8034978583
Department of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning
Faculty of Education
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State

And

Ismaila BOJANG
ismailabojang@gc.edu.gm or ismailabojang2022@gmail.com
+234 7075221554
Department of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning
Faculty of Education
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State

Abstract

This study investigates how artisans in the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Central Market in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria, use functional literacy in their work. It examines how their professional activities and social environments affect their literacy skills. Using Street's socio-cultural theory of literacy and Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory, the research sees literacy as a practice closely linked to context and social setting, rather than just a set of technical skills. A qualitative research approach was used. 15 to 25 minutes semi-structured interviews with twenty artisans from four different trades (vulcanising, hairdressing, tailoring, and carpentry) were conducted. The data was analysed thematically, using an iterative coding process that combined manual interpretation with AI-assisted refinement. Validation was achieved through repeated review and consistency checks.

The study's results reveal a range of functional literacy capabilities within the participant group, spanning from advanced skills in reading, writing, and digital communication to a dependence on verbal interaction, recall, and social support systems. Across all demographic groups, literacy practices were closely linked to occupational requirements; participants exhibited proficiency in trade-specific terminology, symbol interpretation, and routine transactional activities, including sign interpretation, label reading, and receipt verification. Conversely, difficulties were noted in the engagement with complex texts and formal written communication, especially among those with limited formal education.

The study concludes that functional literacy among artisans is dynamic, context-bound, and shaped by lived experiences, social interactions, and workplace practices. These findings underscore the need for adaptable literacy programs that are sensitive to cultural differences, emphasising practical application and learning within the community. The study contributes to ongoing discussions on literacy as a social practice and highlights the importance of aligning literacy programmes with the realities of informal and occupational learning environments.

Key Words: Functional Literacy, Artisans, Sustainability, Lifelong Learning, Occupational Factors

Michela Bastianelli (INAPP - ITALIAN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICIES ANALYSIS)

From Crisis to Renewal: Narrative Coaching and Generative Welfare for a Sociodynamic Approach to Change

Social inequalities represent one of the most pressing and complex challenges for contemporary socioeconomic systems, with profound effects on social cohesion, economic growth, and democratic stability (World Bank, 2021). In recent years, these inequalities have deepened further due to the economic and social crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated disparities related to gender, social class, ethnicity, and territorial belonging (OECD, 2020; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023).

Within this context, **Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs)** have become one of the main tools to promote social inclusion and employment, particularly for vulnerable groups. However, their effectiveness largely depends on their capacity to adapt to individual needs, coordinate with social policies, and foster empowerment processes that strengthen people's agency and employability (ILO, 2019; European Commission, 2021).

The Italian case provides a significant example of how structural inequalities intersect with institutional fragilities. The South of Italy continues to suffer from a weak economic fabric, high unemployment, and persistent inactivity rates, often intertwined with informal work and deep gender and generational gaps (ISTAT, 2024; Benini, 2025). Understanding the reasons why people are not employed or seeking employment requires an analysis that includes personal (care duties, health issues), economic (lack of opportunities, low wages), and cultural (mistrust, lack of self-awareness) factors.

In parallel, data from the **OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)** reveal low average skill levels among Italian adults, hindering both labour market participation and active citizenship (INAPP, 2024; OECD, 2025). These issues are compounded by weak coordination between active and passive policies, fragmented employment services, and the absence of personalized approaches able to meet the real needs of disadvantaged individuals (INAPP, 2023).

Against this backdrop, this paper explores the potential of **narrative coaching** and **generative welfare** as transformative tools for labour market inclusion and social participation.

According to the **International Coach Federation (ICF)**, coaching is a partnership process that supports individuals in defining goals, generating results, and managing personal and professional change. It emphasizes autonomy, awareness, and competence development (ICF, 2023). Empirical evidence shows that interventions based on accompaniment, empowerment, and skill enhancement significantly improve ALMP effectiveness, particularly for NEET youth, women with care responsibilities, people with disabilities, and migrants (OECD, 2020; European Commission, 2021).

Generative welfare, as theorized by Donati and Maspero (2021), moves beyond traditional welfare models by promoting co-responsibility and individual **agency** (Bandura, 1997). It encourages the creation of meaningful relationships and shared value through the development of personal and collective capabilities (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011).

Through an interdisciplinary lens, this paper examines how these two approaches—narrative coaching and generative welfare—can foster **social and occupational capability**, especially among so-called *"hidden inactive"* individuals who require outreach and tailored activation measures, and among those experiencing **multiple deprivation**, i.e., simultaneous forms of disadvantage.

According to Fraboni et al. (2019), this condition affects approximately 15.5% of young Italians (1.6 million people), with peaks of 23.9% in Southern Italy.

The research pursues two main goals:

1. To generate knowledge on the dynamics that sustain labour market inactivity and social exclusion, promoting more stable and durable inclusion pathways;
2. To formulate a **generative narrative coaching model** capable of integrating individual, relational, and institutional dimensions within a more **contextualized, accessible, and systemic** approach to ALMPs.

Methodologically, the study adopts an **autoethnographic approach**, combining the author's professional and personal experience with qualitative research methods such as life stories, participant observation, and focus groups. It also integrates desk analysis of national and international practices of coaching and generative welfare applied to ALMPs, including field experience at the **Employment Guidance Centre "Alberta Fabbretti" in Rome**.

From a reflexive and transformative perspective, the paper investigates how narrative coaching can act as a **sociodynamic lever of change**, activating personal and collective resources, while generative welfare offers the institutional and ethical framework for a new paradigm of participation, equity, and shared well-being.

Ultimately, the study provides both theoretical and operational insights. Theoretically, it contributes to the understanding of coaching and generative welfare as tools for building a more inclusive and capability-oriented society. Operationally, it offers models and strategies to renew labour market policies in alignment with European goals of social justice, sustainability, and human-centered innovation—particularly in light of emerging challenges related to artificial intelligence and digital transformation.

References:

Bandura, A. (1996), Il senso di autoefficacia, aspettative su di sé e azione, Erickson, Trento
Benini, R. (2025). Attivare gli inattivi. Perché gli inattivi sono diventati il principale problema del mercato del lavoro italiano e come si può intervenire per porre un freno a questo preoccupante fenomeno. in Forme, 30 Aprile 2025 https://www.forme.online/2025/04/30/attivare-gli-inattivi/Roma: INAPP.
Donati P. (a cura di) 2022. La teoria relazionale nelle scienze sociali: sviluppi e prospettive, il Mulino, Bologna.
Donati P. & Maspero G. (2021). Dopo la pandemia. Rigenerare la società con le relazioni, Città Nuova, Roma.
European Commission. (2021). European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. Brussels: European Commission.
European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2023). Being Black in the EU: Second Survey on Discrimination and Hate Crime. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
Fraboni R., Savioli M., Segre E., Tinto A., Villa A., (2019), Il benessere dei giovani: un'analisi multidimensionale, In book: Rapporto BES 2019 (pp.195-201), Roma: Istat.
ILO. (2019). World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2019. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
INAPP. (2024). Le competenze cognitive degli adulti in Italia. Prime evidenze dall'Indagine
Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach. Belknap Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674061200

OCSE-PIAAC ciclo 2. https://www.inapp.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/Non-organizzati/INAPP-PIAAC-Short-report.pdf
INAPP. (2023). Politiche attive e passive del lavoro: un mix da riformulare. Roma: INAPP.
International Coach Federation. (2023). ICF Core Competency Model. Retrieved from https://coachingfederation.org/core-competencies
ISTAT. (2022). Rapporto annuale. La situazione del Paese. Roma: Istituto Nazionale di Statistica.
ISTAT. (2024). Il mercato del lavoro. III trimestre 2024. Roma: Istituto Nazionale di Statistica. https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Mercato-del-lavoro-III-trim_2024.pdf
OECD. (2020). Employment Outlook 2020: Worker Security and the COVID-19 Crisis. Paris: OECD Publishing.
OECD. (2024). PIAAC Cycle 2 results: Country note – Italy. Paris: OECD. https://www.inapp.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/Non-organizzati/PIAAC_IIc_Country-note_EN.pdf
Sen, A. (1999). Development as freedom. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
World Bank. (2021). Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2021: Reversals of Fortune. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Evidence-informed policymaking in Adult Learning and Education: insights from interviews with policymakers and stakeholders across the UK and Ireland

Ellen Boeren, Betul Baldan Babayigit, Sharon Clancy, Zyra Evangelista, John Holford

As part of our contribution to the conference, we will present findings from Work Package 3 (WP3) of an ESRC (UK's Economic and Social Research Council)-funded project on Adult Learning and Education Policies (2023–2025**)**. WP3 examined how evidence is understood, interpreted, and used by policymakers and stakeholders involved in Adult Learning and Education (ALE). The project focussed on ALE policymaking in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland.

Aims
Our project aimed to examine policymakers and stakeholders' selection and use of evidence to feed into decision-making processes. We also aimed to gather their views on remaining data gaps that constrain the availability of evidence in the field of adult learning and education.

Conceptual Framework
Our work is guided by the international literature on evidence-informed policymaking. The pathway from evidence to policy is conceptualised as non-linear (Weiss, 1979; Cairney & Oliver, 2017). Such framing underlines that evidence competes with other factors influencing decision-making and that the availability of evidence thus not necessarily leads to its use for policymaking purposes (OECD, 2024). Previous research points to elements of diverging institutional priorities, financial limitations or ideological preferences. Furthermore, evidence is conceptualised as a broad term, including evidence generated through qualitative, quantitative or alternative approaches. Such conceptualisation allowed the examination of interviewees' own interpretations on the meaning of this term.

Methods, Research Design, and Data
We conducted a qualitative comparative study using semi-structured interviews with policymakers and stakeholder organisations across the UK and Ireland. Interviewees included civil servants, policymakers, and stakeholders from trade unions, NGOs, and

learner advocacy organisations. Interviews (n ≈ 40) were coded using both inductive and deductive techniques to identify themes and cross-country patterns between the four jurisdictions of the UK and Ireland.

Results and Conclusions

Our findings revealed that evidence tends to be used to legitimise policy choices rather than to underpin the direction of decision-making. Strategies that arose through evidence reviews and consultations can be ditched in case they do not align with new ministers' or governments' priorities. We also found that evidence selection tends to rely on reputational and relational factors rather than on a thorough engagement with methodological guidelines to judge its robustness. Work by the OECD tends to be referenced because of its reputational status. However, jurisdictions' decision to not participate in PIAAC was driven by budget constraints and the preference to invest such money into adult education interventions instead. Our presentation will offer novel insights on stakeholders' influence over decision-making processes, and the diversity in proximity to policymakers in the devolved countries compared to England. We will also present findings on the interviewees' perceived evidence gaps, and the need for more granular and longitudinal data.

Significance to the field of policy studies in adult education

Our project has collected novel data on the topic of evidence-based policymaking, specifically in the field of adult learning and education. Such data have enabled us to contribute new knowledge to advance the intellectual agenda within the field.

A social justice perspective towards the Skills-First policies in adult learning and education

Pepka Boyadjieva, Petya Ilieva-Trichkova
Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Abstract

Recently, the so-called Skills-First approach to talent management has gained importance (World Economic Forum, 2023). The need for the Skills-First approach has been attributed to a number of recent developments, such as: labour shortages in various economic sectors; the increase in remote work; the growth of online learning; and the increasingly sophisticated use of artificial intelligence and big data. The European Commission (2025) also highlights the persistence of skills gaps and labour shortages and proposes the initiative to build a Union of Skills with a focus on labour market relevance of skills.

While it is relatively clear what the Skills-First approach means for organisations' management, Milana et al. (2025) correctly point out that there are many issues that relate to adult learning and education (ALE), which require critical discussion. Against this background, the paper suggests a social justice perspective towards the application of the Skills-First policies in the field of ALE and argues that this perspective is indispensable in order to fully understand and promote their role for individuals' and societies' well-being.

Theoretically, the paper builds on ideas from Martha Nussbaum's account of the capabilities approach and Nancy Fraser's model of social justice. Nussbaum (2010) emphasises that a flourishing economy and active citizenship require the same skills. She develops a list of ten capabilities which are essential for a person to flourish and live a life that goes beyond economic participation (Nussbaum, 2000). Fraser's (2003; 2009) three-dimensional model of social justice includes redistribution, recognition, and representation as mutually interwoven but irreducible dimensions of justice. The first dimension refers to economic structures and inequalities. Recognition requires examination of the institutionalised patterns of cultural value and whether they constitute actors as peers or as inferior excluded others. Representation means that people have equal voices in decision-making processes. The achievement of the three dimensions of justice depends on both social structures and individual agency.

The paper highlights that the application of a social justice perspective to the Skills-First policies in ALE raises several questions the most important of which are: 1) To what kind of skills should the Skills-First policies refer to in order to contribute to social justice and individuals' identity formation, recognition, employability and civil participation?, and 2) Do Skills-First policies have a potential to mitigate existing social inequalities and encourage social inclusion or they function as an instrument for social reproduction and exclusion? In this paper, we will focus on the first question. We argue that ALE should go beyond narrow economic considerations and envisage the intertwining of different skills if it is meant to contribute to individuals' agency formation and active participation in economic and social spheres.

Empirically, data from the most recent waves of the Adult Education Survey (2022) an Cedefop European Skills and Jobs Survey (2021) will be analysed via descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analyses to provide some evidence that can sustain the paper's arguments. We will explore: 1) the complexity of reasons for adults' participation in non-formal education as a reflection of different aspects of social justice in adult learning and education (redistribution, recognition, and representation), and 2) the adults' views on the importance of technical and social skills for doing better their work.

The paper contributes to the field of policy studies in ALE by arguing that in contemporary societies, marked by severe problems in the development of both the economy and democracy, there is a pressing need for widening and balancing the scope and contents of ALE policies.

Key words: Skills-First policies, Fraser's model of social justice, capabilities approach, adult learning and education, empirical data

References

European Commission (2025). *Communication from the commission to the European parliament, the European council, the council, the European economic and social committee and the committee of the regions - a competitiveness compass for the EU. COM(2025) 30 final*.

Fraser, N. (2003). Social justice in the age of identity politics – Redistribution, recognition, and participation. In N. Fraser & A. Honneth (Eds.), *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange* (pp. 7–109). New York: Verso.

Fraser, N. (2009). *Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Milana, M., Brandi, U., Hodge, S., Hoggan-Kloubert, T., & Morris, T. (2025) Skills, skills, skills! The European Commission's endorsement of a *Skills-First* approach and the future of adult education and lifelong learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *44*(2), 127–130.

Nussbaum, M. (2000). *Women and human development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. (2010). *Not for profit. Why democracy needs humanities*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

World Economic Forum (2023, May). *Putting skills first: A framework for action*. Retrieved April 15, 2025, from www.weforum. org

Universität Hamburg
DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

ESREA

CONFERENCE OF THE ESREA NETWORK ON POLICY STUDIES IN ADULT EDUCATION

Adult Learning and Education: Widening the scope for action
13-15 May 2026, University of Hamburg, Germany

SYMPOSIUM CONFIGURATION 2

Title : Experiential Learning and Non-Formal Knowledge: A Worldwide Perspective 2

Chairperson. Speakers. Pr. Hervé Breton (University of Tours, France); Pr Carmen Cavaco (University of Lisbon, Portugal), Catarina Paulos, (Instituto Politécnico de Beja, Portugal), Dai Matsumoto (University of Tohoku, Japan). 2

SYMPOSIUM CONCEPT NOTE 2

INTERVENTION 1. PR. HERVÉ BRETON 4

Title : Formalizing Experiential Knowledge: Procedures, Criteria, and Global Policies...... 4

Abstract : 4

INTERVENTION 2. PR. CARMEN CAVACO & PR. CATARINA PAULOS 5

Title : Recognition and Validation of Experiential Learning in Portugal: Challenges and Tensions of a Public Adult Education Policy 5

Abstract 5

INTERVENTION 3. PR. DAI MATSUMOTO 6

Title : Learning and Practice in Circulation: Applying Learning Outcomes in Japan's "Knowledge Circulation Society" 6

Abstract 6

BIBLIOGRAPHY : 7

SYMPOSIUM CONFIGURATION

Title : Experiential Learning and Non-Formal Knowledge: A Worldwide Perspective

Chairperson. Speakers. Pr. Hervé Breton (University of Tours, France); Pr Carmen Cavaco (University of Lisbon, Portugal), Catarina Paulos, (Instituto Politécnico de Beja, Portugal), Dai Matsumoto (University of Tohoku, Japan).

SYMPOSIUM CONCEPT NOTE

The relation between knowledge and experience is structurally problematic, both from an epistemological and a methodological perspective. Emancipation was conceived in science and philosophy, at the beginning of the 19th century, as a fundamental condition for the acquisition of rational knowledge, emphasizing the necessity for individuals to critically engage with the world rather than passively receive information. On this basis, the emergence of the Lifelong Learning policy, supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the European Community through the Lisbon process, remains, despite being guided by ethical and justice-oriented objectives, deeply rooted in a problematic soil: the theory by which knowledge arises through experience, and the methodology by which this experiential knowledge can be effectively captured, structured, and communicated through words, texts, and categorical frameworks. Furthermore, the challenge extends to evaluating the validity and transferability of such knowledge across different cultural and social contexts, raising questions about whose experiences are recognized and how institutional frameworks may shape or constrain the forms of knowledge that are legitimized.

Through the last forty years, as Madhu Singh has documented, some propositions, dispositifs, and solutions have been built worldwide, on all five continents. The relevance of these dispositifs is far from identical, because each certification and validation policy is rooted in the history of a place, region, or state, and depends on the profession. However, from another perspective, it is possible to consider that each dispositif, worldwide, responds at its own scale to the two problematic points previously mentioned: from which theory it is possible to collectively consider (by the certifier, by the evaluation committee of the VA, by the professional community…) that knowledge is located in experience [1], and which dispositif (narration of experience, description of practice, dialogue on situation…) allows the bridging of experience acquired through action with the skills required by certification and the profession [2].

This research has been conducted worldwide by various researchers, and especially by Mrs. Madhu Singh, through the work of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. It has permitted the implementation, within a valuable range and dedicated website [The Global Observatory of Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning], of a unique observatory on worldwide practices regarding the Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning. This observatory applies a comprehensive global methodology, including the cartography of Lifelong Learning policies by country [1], the systematic identification of emblematic cases or systems for RVA, and the analysis of how these practices are integrated into national and regional educational frameworks. These emblematic cases are considered as foundational pillars for any effective lifelong learning policy, offering guidance for policymakers, educators, and practitioners in designing, implementing, and assessing validation systems. The results have been carefully

compiled, as mentioned, on the website, which continues to produce updated data and expand its repository of information, allowing stakeholders to compare, learn, and adapt practices from different contexts. In addition, numerous publications have arisen from this research, providing theoretical foundations, methodological guidance, and empirical evidence to support the development of RVA systems (Singh, 2015; Pavlova & Singh, 2022).

The present symposium is proposed to preserve, consolidate, and expand the fundamental resources constituted by the observatory and the related research, by mobilizing the networks involved, and to collectively develop forward-looking perspectives across the five continents. It aims to integrate the experiential knowledge approach in adult education and Lifelong Learning policy, while also opening dialogues with health policy, therapeutic educational practices, and the recognition of knowledge derived from experiences of vulnerability, illness, and social marginalization. By bringing together diverse international actors, the symposium seeks to foster a global exchange of best practices, comparative case studies, and methodological innovations in Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation (RVA) systems. From this symposium, a movement of RVA is expected to emerge, crossing international perspectives and adopting an interdisciplinary approach that bridges education and health, considering ethical, theoretical, and methodological dimensions. Participants will be encouraged to reflect on how experiential knowledge can inform policy, professional development, and practice in both educational and healthcare settings, while addressing equity, inclusion, and social justice. One concrete objective pursued would be to lay the foundations for a UNESCO Chair on experiential knowledge in Lifelong Learning policy, serving as a platform to promote research, training, and advocacy in this field. In addition, the symposium is intended to generate long-term collaborative projects, support the creation of networks for knowledge sharing, and provide a roadmap for integrating experiential learning into formal, non-formal, and informal educational frameworks worldwide.

Keywords : adult education, experience, knowledge, Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation (RVA)

Universität Hamburg
DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

ESREA

INTERVENTION 1. PR. HERVÉ BRETON

Pr. Hervé Breton, Professor of Adult Education at the University of Tours, Senior Member of the Institut Universitaire de France (IUF), and Associate Researcher at the French Research Institute on Japan (UMIFRE 19, MEAE-CNRS). herve.breton@univ-tours.fr

Title : Formalizing Experiential Knowledge: Procedures, Criteria, and Global Policies

Abstract :

The relationship between knowledge and experience is structurally problematic, both from an epistemological and a methodological perspective. Beyond the proliferation of categories seeking to articulate the practical and theoretical dimensions of knowledge, recognition and validation systems must, in order to be effective, rely on procedures that make it possible to formalize knowledge acquired through experience, thereby enabling its integration into certification processes. This paper aims to establish an inventory of these formalization procedures, by differentiating criteria and defining their logics: categorization of competences, argumentation on correspondences, narration of individual trajectories, description of situated action, and so forth. This inventory will draw on the work already carried out within the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), based in Hamburg, and in particular on the observatory that has documented, on a global scale, the development of education and training policies specifically designed to formalize and validate experiential knowledge. In this context, several publications have been coordinated, making it possible to analyze and understand the uniqueness of these policies across the five continents and within each of the countries concerned (Singh, 2015; Pavlova & Singh, 2022).

Keywords: Competence Assessment, Experiential Knowledge, Knowledge Formalization, Lifelong Learning Policies, et Validation and Certification.

INTERVENTION 2. PR. CARMEN CAVACO & PR. CATARINA PAULOS

Pr. Carmen Cavaco, Professor at the University of Lisbonn (Portugal) & Catarina Paulos, Professor at the Instituto Politécnico de Beja, (Portugal).

Title : Recognition and Validation of Experiential Learning in Portugal: Challenges and Tensions of a Public Adult Education Policy

Abstract

UNESCO and European Union guidelines have supported public policies in Portugal that promote the recognition and validation of experiential learning, aiming to enhance the educational and professional qualifications of adults. This paper aims to problematise the complexity of the process, namely the challenges and tensions involved, as well as its implications for the work of adults and the professionals engaged. Situated within the field of Education Sciences, the analysis results from a synthesis of qualitative research conducted by the authors on this topic, through interviews with professionals and adults certified under this public policy. The theoretical framework is grounded in elements concerning experience, adult education, and the recognition and validation of experiential learning. The process under analysis is based on these assumptions: experience holds formative potential, and experiential learning can be related to disciplinary and academic knowledge. Empirical data confirm that the relationship between knowledge and experience is problematic from both epistemological and methodological perspectives, which underlies the complexity of the recognition and validation of experiential learning. In conclusion, it can be stated that, despite its complexity, challenges, and tensions, this process enables the formative development of adults and the professionals involved. This is important for informing public policies in this area.

Keywords: Recognition and validation of experiential learning. Experience. Adult education policy.

Universität Hamburg
DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

ESREA

INTERVENTION 3. PR. DAI MATSUMOTO

Pr. Dai Matsumoto, Professor at the university of Tohoku, Sendai (Japan)

Title : Learning and Practice in Circulation: Applying Learning Outcomes in Japan's "Knowledge Circulation Society"

Abstract

Despite repeated policy debates on the evaluation of learning outcomes in lifelong learning since the late 1980s, the Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning has not been substantially institutionalized in Japan. Although some initiatives have been proposed, they have rarely become embedded in society. This presentation addresses three paradoxes in this context. The first paradox is that lifelong learning remains vibrant despite the underdevelopment of RVA. This is linked to Japan's vocational training system, which has relied on in-company training rather than schools or public programs. As a result, certificates obtained through lifelong or recurrent education have not necessarily been socially valued. The second paradox is that, although RVA has not been institutionalized, the application of learning outcomes has been emphasized. The slogan of the "Knowledge Circulation Society," introduced in the late 2000s, highlights circulation as the use of experiential knowledge in practice. The third paradox is that, while outcome-based learning has been promoted, recent adult education emphasizes the significance of "non-evaluative" learning, pointing to the need for spaces free from evaluators' intent. Through these paradoxes, the presentation offers insights from the Japanese context into international debates on RVA in non-formal and informal learning.

Keywords: lifelong learning in Japan, "Knowledge Circulation Society", application of learning outcomes, Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation (RVA), non-formal and informal learning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY :

Breton, H. (2016). Mobilités transnationales et ingénierie des certifications : enjeux et limites des approches compétences. *Journal of International Mobility* (PUF), 2016/1, 4, 25-42. Doi : https://doi.org/10.3917/jim.004.0025

Breton, H. (2019). Réciprocité des points de vue et réflexivité collective en VAE : quel paradigme pour la validation des savoirs expérientiels ? *Formation et profession* [Canada], 27 (2), 19-31. Doi : http://dx.doi.org/10.18162/fp.2019.492

Breton, H. (2018). La reconnaissance et la validation des acquis de l'expérience en France : le paradigme de l'expérientiel à l'épreuve des certifications. *Lifelong, Lifewide Learning* (LLL) [Italie], 13, 30 62-74. http://www.edaforum.it/ojs/index.php/LLL/issue/view/6

Breton, H. (2018). O reconhecimento e a validação de experiências adquiridas na França : o paradigma experiencial à prova das certificações. *Trabalho & Educação*, (Université Fédérale du Minas Gerais, UFMG, Belo Horizonte, [Brésil]), 27, 3, 43-57. https://periodicos.ufmg.br/index.php/trabedu/article/view/9840.

Cavaco, C. (2013). Reconnaissance et validation des acquis de l'expérience. Les résultats (in)attendus. *Questions Vives, 10*(20), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.4000/questionsvives.1383

Singh, M. (2015). *Global perspectives on recognising non-formal and informal learning: Why recognition matters*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-15278-3

Matsumoto, D. et Ando, K. (2022). *Jimotogaku* and generational agency : the learning and participation of community development successors in Japan. *Annual Bulletin, Graduate School of Education, Tohoku University*, 8, 1-18.

Pavlova, M., & Singh, M. (Eds.). (2022). *Recognizing green skills through non-formal learning: A comparative study in Asia*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-2072-1

Big Money – Small Money. About the relationship between gender and the responsibility for important financial decisions

Klaus Buddeberg*, Johanna Husting*

* University of Hamburg

The discussion about adult basic competencies started relatively late in Germany compared to other European countries where national literacy assessments had been carried out, such as in England (Harding, 2011) or France (Jeantheau, 2007). Following several funding initiatives on the topic of literacy from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Education was finally launched in 2016 and is due to end in 2026 (BMBF & KMK, 2016). The nature and scope of a possible continuation have not yet been officially communicated. The National Decade primarily focuses on research and practice relating to adults with very low basic skills, essentially following a 'no one left behind' approach. In 2023, the former government's Federal Ministers for Education and Research and for Finance launched a new policy strategy called the 'Financial Education Initiative'. This strategy was criticised for placing too much emphasis on individual responsibility for financial affairs while ignoring the wider context of economic situations, which are often beyond people's control. According to critics, instead of being an educational project, the strategy appears to be a political one (Höhne, 2024). When comparing the National Decade with the Financial Education Strategy, there has been a paradigm shift from 'no one left behind' to 'personal responsibility', moving away from the clear focus on basic education.

This paper addresses questions concerning financial education and sheds light on the financial practices of adults. It draws on the results of the second cycle of data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC: OECD, 2024). Current research on financial literacy shows that it encompasses not only financial knowledge, but also financial attitudes and behaviour (e.g. OECD & INFE, 2020). In addition to assessing adult basic skills (reading, numeracy and problem solving), PIAAC provides data on everyday practices that can be related to finances, such as performing calculations or using information to make financial decisions.

The relationship between competencies and practices is explained by Practice Engagement Theory (Reder, 1994) and has been confirmed through empirical research based on the first cycle of PIAAC (Reder et al., 2020). Both more recent and older studies address the issue of gender-specific practices. Beblo et al. (2023) found that women are more likely to be responsible for writing-related tasks when it comes to childcare. As early as 1988, Jean Lave observed that handling small amounts of money was more likely to be assigned to women, while making far-reaching financial decisions (big money) appeared to be more of a male domain. Lave's observations form the basis of our analysis.

We use the variable 'How often in your daily life do you use information to make important financial decisions?', which relates to strategic financial decisions, i.e. 'big money'. Initially, we consider this variable in conjunction with gender in a bivariate analysis, drawing a country comparison. If a gender gap is evident, this suggests that gender-specific money management might be at play. To investigate the actual correlation between gender while controlling for

other factors, the second analysis step involves a multivariate analysis with theoretically and empirically justified control variables.

The discussion of the results highlights implications for the education policy debate, addressing their position in the tense relationship between the two policy frameworks of the National Decade and the Financial Education Strategy.

References

Beblo, M., Becker, D., & Grotlüschen, A. (2023). Wer macht den Papierkram? Die Rolle von Literalität, finanzieller Kompetenz und Geschlecht bei der administrativen Aufgabenteilung im Haushalt. In A. Grotlüschen, K. Buddeberg, & H. Solga (Eds.), Edition ZfE: Vol. 14. Interdisziplinäre Analysen zur LEO-Studie 2018 – Leben mit geringer Literalität: Vertiefende Erkenntnisse zur Rolle des Lesens und Schreibens im Erwachsenenalter (1. Auflage, pp. 93–118). Springer VS; Springer Fachmedien. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-38873-7_5

BMBF; KMK. (2016). Grundsatzpapier zur Nationalen Dekade für Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung 2016-2026: Den funktionalen Analphabetismus in Deutschland verringern und das Grundbildungsniveau erhöhen. https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/a33_grundsatzpapier_nationale_dekade.pdf

Harding, C. (2011). 2011 Skills for Life Survey: Headline findings. BIS Research Paper. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32277/11-1367-2011-skills-for-life-survey-findings.pdf

Höhne, T. (2024). Finanzbildung als politisches Projekt. Eine kritische Analyse der FDP-Initiative zur finanziellen Bildung (OBS Arbeitspapier No. 71). Otto Brenner Stiftung. https://www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_data/stiftung/02_Wissenschaftsportal/03_Publikationen/AP71_Finanzbildung.pdf

Jeantheau, J.-P. (2007). Low levels of literacy in France. First results from IVQ Survey 2004/05, Focus on the ANLCI-Module. In F. Knabe (Ed.), Wissenschaft und Praxis in der Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung (pp. 41–58). Waxmann.

OECD. (2024). Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World? Survey of Adult Skills 2023. OECD skills studies. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/b263dc5d-en

OECD, & INFE. (2020). International Survey of Adult Financial Literacy. www.oecd.org/financial/education/launchoftheoecdinfeglobalfinancialliteracysurveyreport.htm

Reder, S. (1994). Practice-Engagement Theory: A Sociocultural Approach to Literacy Across Languages and Cultures. In B. M. Ferdman, R.-M. Weber, & A. G. Ramirez (Eds.), SUNY series, literacy, culture, and learning. Literacy across languages and cultures (pp. 33–70). State University of New York Press.

Reder, S., Gauly, B., & Lechner, C. M. (2020). Practice makes perfect: Practice engagement theory and the development of adult literacy and numeracy proficiency. International Review of Education, 66(2-3), 267–288. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-020-09830-5

Policy feedback effects on mass politics in adult education: theoretical contribution and research designs

Margherita Bussi - University of Louvain

Do adult learners support adult education programmes? Does policy design matter for triggering learners' support, opposition or indifference towards educational programme? What are the effects of policy design and implementation of adult education programmes on adult learners' democratic and civic behaviour?

Drawing on historical institutionalism, the policy feedback effects on mass politics can help answering these questions by unveiling how policy design distributes resources and sends interpretative messages to beneficiaries (Bruch et al 2010) and how these shape or unmake beneficiaries' demand for that specific policy (Pierson, 1993; Bussi et al, 2022). Moreover, policy feedback scholars have also investigated the effect of policy design on beneficiaries' democratic and civic behaviour, such as volunteering (Mettler, 2002).

Right and far-right parties are in power in several European countries and their conception of social policies (Fenger, 2018), including adult education (Grotlüschen et al 2025), might have long lasting effects on how policies are designed and their effect on democratic aspects ranging from adult learners' opinion towards policies to individual civic engagement (Larsen, 2019). For this reason, this approach is promising because it delves into the policy-politics dynamics and their democratic implications.

Moreover, while policy feedback effects on mass politics dealing with social and educational policies has received attention (Garritzmann & Wehl, 2025; Mettler 2005), there are hardly any studies focusing on adult learners. While this can be due to the fragmented nature across policy areas (Kalenda and Desjardins, 2025), it is argued in this contribution that is possible to develop a new research agenda developing adopting the policy feedback effect on mass politics as theoretical stance.

The paper starts by contextualising policy feedback effects and its mass politics aspect. It secondly delves into the recent literature dealing with social and educational policies. The third part presents how the main concepts linked to the policy feedback effects on mass politics could apply to adult education policy and their beneficiaries as well as how it articulates with existing adult education policy research. The fourth part uses the case of training policies for the unemployed as an example. A final part concludes on the limits and benefits of this approach.

References

Bussi, M., Dupuy, C., & Van Ingelgom, V. (2022). Does social policy change impact on politics? A review of policy feedbacks on citizens' political participation and attitudes towards politics. *Journal of European Social Policy*, *32*(5), 607-618.

Bruch SK, Marx Ferree M and Soss J. (2010) From Policy to Polity: Democracy, Paternalism,and the Incorporation of Disadvantaged Citizens. American Sociological Review 75: 205-226.

Fenger M. The social policy agendas of populist radical right parties in comparative perspective. *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*. 2018;34(3):188-209. doi:10.1080/21699763.2018.1483255

Garritzmann, S., & Wehl, N. (2025). How Education Policies Shape Political Inequality: Analyzing Policy Feedback Effects in Germany. *Comparative Political Studies*, *58*(6), 1273-1314.

Grotlüschen, Anke and Buddeberg, Klaus and Cafantaris, Karola, Dialogue or Firewall? How the Providers of Adult Education in Germany React on Influence of the Extreme Right (February 21, 2025). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=5147215 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5147215

Kalenda, J., & Desjardins, R. (2025). Using historical institutionalism to study adult learning systems. In *A Modern Guide to Adult Learning Systems* (pp. 19-36). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Larsen, E. G. (2019). Policy feedback effects on mass publics: A quantitative review. *Policy studies journal*, *47*(2), 372-394.

Mettler S. (2002) Bringing the State Back Into Civic Engagement: Policy Feedback Effects of the G.I. Bill for World War II Veterans. *American Political Science Review* 96:351-365

Pierson P. (1993) When Effect Becomes Cause: Policy Feedback and Political Change. *World Politics* 45: 595-628.

Bridging the Literacy Gap: Innovative Approaches to Second Language Learning for Adult Migrants

Annamaria Cacchione (INDIRE)

When we talk about literacy, we refer to the acquisition of reading and writing skills in one's mother tongue and to adults who have not completed—or never begun—this process (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2024). In recent decades, however, large-scale migrations have brought to light a different phenomenon: people leaving countries and cultures where writing was not essential (or did not exist) to settle in highly literate societies, where being illiterate often means being excluded.

Starting from an analysis of the current situation in Italy, this contribution seeks to outline the general scenario and assess the adequacy of existing educational policies, highlighting the most critical methodological and organizational issues. Within a conceptual framework that integrates sociological and psychological approaches to second language learning (Atkinson, 2002), attention is focused on the actual impact of current teaching solutions compared with the potential of innovative, evidence-based alternatives. The underlying hypothesis is that this line of research can contribute to raising literacy levels across a much broader population, encompassing not only migrant adults but also struggling readers and adults below PIAAC Level 3. In this sense, the study takes the form of action research, aimed at translating theoretical and methodological insights into everyday classroom practice.

The research is based on a mixed-method design that originated in Italy with the institutional monitoring conducted by INDIRE between 2018 and 2021 to evaluate the progress of the newly established public adult education system (INDIRE, 2018). The data collected—through both quantitative and qualitative analyses—revealed significant inadequacies in a system initially designed for the lifelong learning of Italian adults, which was soon overwhelmed by foreign adults with entirely different needs. Subsequent investigations focused on teacher training and the educational provision of the 130 Adult Education Centres. Data gathered through questionnaires and field interviews showed that most teachers lack specific pre-service training, and that the current educational offer is insufficient to meet existing demand, which is heavily concentrated in LASLLIAM Levels 1–3, available only in exceptional cases (Cacchione, 2024).

A year-long observation of teaching practices, combined with the testing of an innovative method grounded in scientific evidence (Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020), led to the development of a curriculum specifically designed for L1-illiterate learners facing constraints of time, energy, and mindset. As van de Craats et al. (2015) clearly demonstrated, illiterate adults are highly context-dependent and encounter unique difficulties with abstract reasoning.

The proposed curriculum aims to foster sufficient decoding competence to achieve a basic level of reading fluency for understanding simple, targeted texts. It is structured around phonological awareness through sound manipulation techniques, integrated within a global–analytic and situated reading methodology. Tested with a small cohort of 20 learners, it proved highly effective, although further trials are needed for full validation. More importantly, the rapid progress observed in comprehending texts of medium complexity suggests promising implications for a much wider audience, including children and adults with dyslexia as well as adults with functional illiteracy.

Atkinson, D. (2002). Toward a sociocognitive approach to second language acquisition. The Modern Language Journal, 86(4), 525–545.

Cacchione, A. (2024). La scuola dimenticata. Nuova Cultura.

Council of Europe. (2022). Reference guide on literacy and second language learning for the linguistic integration of adult migrants (LASLLIAM). Council of Europe Publishing.

INDIRE. (2018). Viaggio nell'istruzione degli adulti in Italia: Alla scoperta di esigenze, problemi e soluzioni. Ediguida.

Peyton, J. K., & Young-Scholten, M. (2020). Teaching adult immigrants with limited formal education: Theory, research and practice. Multilingual Matters.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2024). World education statistics. UNESCO.

van de Craats, I., Kurvers, J., & van Hout, R. (2015). Adult literacy, second language and cognition. Center for Language Studies.

Invisible Voices: Narratives of Youth in Institutional Care and Their Learning Processes

Carmen de Jesus Dores Cavac, Maria Suzanete Cavalcanti De Oliveira

Abstract

This paper presents part of an ongoing investigation within the Doctoral Program in Education, specializing in Adult Education, developed at the Institute of Education of the University of Lisbon. The study seeks to understand the experiential learning process of Brazilian youth in institutional care, who have also experienced substance use. It is based on the premise that education is a broad and diffuse process, present in all times and spaces of life, and that care institutions, beyond their protective role, can serve as educational environments for holistic development. The central issue lies in the social and academic silencing of the formative experiences of institutionalized youth, whose voices are rarely considered in research and public policy. This absence contrasts with the scale of institutionalization in Brazil, where approximately 54,000 children and adolescents live in care units (IBGE, 2019). The invisibility of these individuals and the lack of studies that value their narratives motivated this research. The theoretical framework draws from contributions in Education Sciences and Social and Human Sciences. Experience is considered a privileged source of learning (Canário, 2002; Cavaco, 2009; Freire, 2000), often produced in unstructured and unintended situations. Institutionalization, despite its challenges, can also offer learning opportunities through relationships between youth and professionals. Furthermore, youth is approached as a social construct (Pais, 2003; Frigotto, 2006; Alves, 2008), marked by diversity and the search for meaning, often expressed through risky behaviors such as substance use—understood here as a form of coping and seeking belonging. Methodologically, a qualitative, hermeneutic-based approach was chosen, prioritizing the understanding of how youth interpret their own life paths. Eighteen biographical interviews were conducted with institutionalized or reintegrated youth, allowing for the reconstruction of their life stories, focusing on spaces, people, significant moments, and acquired learning. The biographical method proved particularly suitable, as it recovers narrated memories from the subjects' perspectives, valuing historical, social, cultural, and experiential dimensions (Finger, 2003; Nóvoa, 2017). The interviews enabled the identification of key transformative moments, reflection on implicit and explicit learning, and awareness of attitudes and behaviors developed throughout their journeys. This methodology contributes both to scientific knowledge production and to participants' self-formation processes, as it promotes the re-signification of lived experiences. As an expected outcome, the research aims to offer a broader understanding of the experiential learning process of these youth, recognizing them as reflective, autonomous individuals capable of attributing meaning to their trajectories. It also seeks to contribute to scientific and social debates on the relevance of educational practices in institutional care, highlighting that learning can emerge in adverse contexts. The study reinforces the need for public policies that consider youth narratives and voices as central elements in building strategies for protection, inclusion, and development. In summary, this investigation not only sheds light on the reality of a socially invisible group but also calls upon academia and society to reflect on experiential learning in vulnerable contexts. Such reflection is essential to expand the understanding of the role of adult and youth education in building fairer and more inclusive futures.

Keywords: Youth; Experiential learning; Institutional care; Substance use; Biographical narratives.

Community Education for Social Transformation in Ireland

Eve Cobain & Rebecca Jackson (AONTAS)

Keywords: Social Transformation; Community Education; Inclusion; Civic Engagement; Neo-liberal Context

This paper presents findings from a three-month study on the transformative potential of community education across the island of Ireland. It explores the character and scope of transformative learning utilising Freirean principles, which it argues is force multiplier for public policy. It also examines barriers to practice, resulting from a neo-liberal agenda, which curtails transformative practice and threatens to undermine the sustainability of the sector.

Methodology:

The research takes a mixed-methods approach, which is advantageous in capturing the breadth of provision, as well as in-depth reflection on practice. Research participants included community education practitioners and other key stakeholders with an interest in adult education policy and practice. Learners engaging with organisations participating in the research were also supported to develop and share their story.

Respondents	**Method**	**Number of Participants**
Adult Education Practitioners	Survey	38
	Practitioner Focus Groups x 2	9
	Practitioner Interviews	4
	CEFA Focus Group	3
Policy Stakeholders	Policy Stakeholders Interviews	3
Learners	Learner Stories	5

Results:

Community education across Ireland plays an increasingly vital role in fostering the inclusion of marginalised groups in adult education, and public life (Cobain et al., 2021; Cobain et al., 2023). Their engagement is supported through modes of practice that are learner-centred and democratic, rooted in dialogue and the co-construction of meaning. This promotes civic

engagement and advances equality, often in disadvantaged, disenfranchised communities (Doody, 2021). This approach means the practice is uniquely positioned to address complex societal challenges.

Providers engaging in this research highlighted the prevalence of issues such as isolation, low educational attainment, intergenerational poverty, and unemployment in the communities they serve. Our research highlights how community education addresses these issues by opening pathways to learning for groups at risk of marginalisation. The flexible, relational approach and wraparound supports are central to sustaining participation and progression. Learners consistently report increased confidence, improved wellbeing, stronger family relationships, and a greater sense of social connectedness. Importantly, communities also benefit, as learners are empowered to address local challenges collectively, strengthening civic engagement and democratic participation.

Despite its value to communities and wider society, adult and community education across the island of Ireland faces significant challenges to practice. This is largely due to the current neo-liberal policy focus on skills and economic inclusion as drivers of equality in society (Magrath & Fitzsimons, 2019). This approach threatens the realisation of community education's social value at a time of rising polarisation, persistent inequality, and looming global crises (Social Justice Ireland, 2024). As such, its continued development requires coordinated policy attention, adequate resources, and an explicit commitment to its democratic, learner-centered ethos. Only through such support and investment, we argue, can community education fully realise its transformative potential, addressing inequalities, strengthening civic life, and preparing learners and communities for the complex social, economic, and environmental challenges of the 21st century.

References

Cobain, E., Dowdall, L., O'Reilly, N and Suzuki, A. 2021. *CEN CENSUS 2020 Community Education in a Time of COVID-19.* Dublin: AONTAS.

Cobain, E., Neilands, C., Swan, L and Meyler, A. 2023. *AONTAS Northern Ireland Community Education Census 2021-2022.* Dublin: AONTAS.

Doody, S. 2021. *A Study of the Role, Contribution and Impact of Education and Training Board (ETB) Further Education and Training Provision and Support Services in Community Education in Ireland.* Dublin: ETBI.

Magrath, C., and Fitzsimons, C. 2019. Funding community education in Ireland - Making the case for a needs-based approach. *Journal of Social Science Education.* 18(4), pp. 38-50.

Social Justice Ireland. 2024. *Inequality and Social Cohesion: The potential impact of economic inequality on integration.* Dublin: Social Justice Ireland.

Data Integration and the Future Measurement of Adult Learning Systems: Towards More Comprehensive Comparative Reporting

Richard Desjardins (University of California, Los Angeles)

Jan Kalenda (Tomas Bata University in Zlin)

Abstract

Comparative research in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) has, over the past decades, provided important insights into participation patterns, institutional settings, and policy orientations across countries. Yet, much of this work has remained fragmented, often focusing on isolated indicators or narrow comparative metrics. **In this conceptual and theoretical paper, we argue for the adoption of Adult Learning Systems (ALS) as the principal unit of analysis in OECD countries.** By shifting the analytical lens from individual participation or single policy measures to the multi-level perspective at micro, meso- and macro-, we seek to capture the **complex interplay between provision, demand, governance, and outcomes that together shape opportunities for ALE.**

Our argument unfolds in three steps. First, we take stock of **what has been mapped and compared to date in ALE research across OECD countries.** Existing efforts have been invaluable in identifying variation among them, but they rarely consider the systemic interactions that underpin these differences. Reporting tends to emphasise descriptive statistics without addressing how these elements are coordinated, by whom, and with what effects for various target groups/stakeholders. Against this background, we propose ALS as the most suitable unit of analysis, offering a coherent yet flexible framework for comparative international inquiry.

Second, we explain **why reporting at the level of ALS is necessary.** Adult learning opportunities are not determined by single policies or providers, but by the coordination of multiple actors and institutions across meso- and macro-level contexts. Moreover, it is also vital to analyse how learning needs are coordinated at the micro-level and interact with other levels. Such a perspective highlights both systemic strengths and systemic blind spots. Moreover, it provides researchers and policymakers with a shared conceptual language for assessing performance and designing interventions to optimise coordination at different levels.

Third, we argue that the field of ALE is undergoing a profound transformation, necessitating a corresponding shift in **how adult learning systems are measured and reported**. Emerging technological capacities, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, are opening new possibilities for advancing the field. At the core of this progress lies data integration, which holds the potential to drive significant innovation. These developments underscore the need to move beyond **simple information approaches** — limited to static indicators of participation or inputs, as well as outputs — towards a **more complex information approach** that captures the dynamic processes of coordination across the levels outlined above.

We suggest that this complex approach should integrate three distinct but complementary types of information: (1) information for research, enabling systematic comparison and theory-building; (2) information for policy design, providing evidence for targeted interventions; and (3) information for coordination, supporting the alignment of learning needs, opportunities, and stakeholder interest at different levels. Together, these dimensions form the basis for a more nuanced and comprehensive reporting of ALS, capable of reflecting both structural features and ongoing transformations.

Exploring Adult Literacy with PIAAC: Practice Engagement and Policy Implications

Gregor Dutz (University of Hamburg)
gregor.dutz@uni-hamburg.de

Keywords: PIAAC, Literacy Practices, Practice Engagement

Adult literacy policy debates often emphasize individual skills and competencies, typically assessed through large-scale instruments such as PIAAC. However, this competence-oriented perspective risks overlooking the everyday practices in which literacy is embedded, shaped, and transformed (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). The Practice Engagement Theory asserts that individuals develop reading and writing proficiencies through sustained participation in routine literacy activities. Conversely, these proficiencies influence the extent to which individuals engage in such practices (Reder, 2009). Evidence for this reciprocal relationship has been drawn, among others, from German PIAAC-L data (Reder, Gauly & Lechner, 2020).

Data from the first PIAAC cycle indicated a decrease in literacy practices compared to the 1990s IALS survey. This result has been invoked to account for the unexpected decline or stagnation in literacy proficiency observed in many countries since that period, despite significant technological advancements and expanded educational opportunities (Desjardins, 2020). Findings from PIAAC Cycle 2 reveal that this pattern of stagnation or decline persists across numerous nations, prompting renewed debate over its underlying causes.

Drawing on cycle 1 and 2 of the PIAAC survey, this contribution shows that while overall literacy proficiency may stagnate or decline, the frequency and character of reading practices are changing in differentiated ways. Reading long texts in everyday life declines, while engagement with short, practical texts - both at home and work - persists or increases. Preliminary analyses also show that adults with low literacy skills in particular engage less frequently in certain reading practices. These shifts go unrecognized by policy that continues to frame literacy as a static skill, rather than a set of evolving practices interconnected with social context, language, and institutional requirements.

The presentation argues for a policy approach that acknowledges the dynamic and context-dependent nature of literacy. It scrutinizes how current measurement tools and indicators may fail to capture relevant practices, especially of adults with lower proficiency levels or multilingual backgrounds. The findings challenge the adequacy of policy frameworks focusing only on skills and argue for a broader understanding of literacy. By reframing literacy policy through the lens of practice, the contribution points toward more inclusive and real-life oriented approaches to adult learning and social participation.

References

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (2000). Literacy Practices. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton, & R. Ivanič (Hrsg.), Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context (S. 7–14). London.

Desjardins, R. (2020). Micro and macro drivers affecting adult literacy proficiency profiles across countries. International Review of Education, 66(2–3), 289–340. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-020-09842-1

Reder, S. (2009). The Development of Literacy and Numeracy in Adult Life. In S. Reder & J. Bynner (Hrsg.), Tracking Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills: Findings from Longitudinal Research (S. 59–84). Routledge.

Reder, S., Gauly, B., & Lechner, C. (2020). Practice makes perfect: Practice engagement theory and the development of adult literacy and numeracy proficiency. International Review of Education, 66(2–3).

Peter Ehrström

Raise the voices of the voiceless

– A deliberative learning ladder for advancing civic participation

In this paper three deliberative and walk-related methods are combined to form a learning process staircase with the aim to improve civic participatory learning for vulnerable groups in transforming cityscapes and thus to support individuals learning to raise their voices in deliberative forms of participation.

In times of strong right wing populist movements, the risk of vulnerable and minority groups being silenced and unrecognized in societal transformation processes is increasing. There is even debate on the topic of words and terms connected to social justice, inclusion, diversity and equity being watched and/or outright scrubbed from official documents and programs. For vulnerable groups and individuals it is increasingly important not only to improve knowledge of issues, but learning on participation itself.

In this paper I discuss the combination of three low-threshold deliberative methods to form a deliberative learning process ladder. The idea of a learning process ladder was first proposed with the introduction of method Voice-Resonance Walks (Ahlrichs & Ehrström, 2024), as combining that entry-level low-threshold method with more advanced walk-related methods, the walk-centric Development Walks (Raisio & Ehrström 2017 and Ehrström & Katajamäki 2013) and the walk-including Deliberative Walks (Raisio & Ehrström 2017, Ehrström 2020). The latter combines elements of both place-based and theoretical in-class learning, and can also be understood as a spring-board to more theory-oriented deliberations and participation.

The three methods have individually been developed as deliberative methods that are aimed to be more equal for vulnerable and lesser-educated groups in society than more theory-oriented methods. Together they can form a learning process ladder, that ideally improve both the interest to participate for vulnerable groups and civic learning to participate, by progressing up a learning process ladder to more advanced forms of deliberative methods while gaining confidence, knowledge and skills for participation in more demanding deliberations and societal tramsformation and planning discussions.

The paper further includes a short discussion on how walk-centric and including methods also can be implemented in Higher learning, for increased understanding of how walk-centric and -related methods can improve civic learning processes in contested urban cityscapes. This discussion is based on the results and experiences (participant questionnaires) from three walk-centric deliberations committed as course elements in Stuttgart in Summer semester 2025.

Keywords: Deliberative methods, civic learning, vulnerable groups, walk-centric.

Sources

Ahlrichs R. & Ehrström P., (2024), Walk-centric deliberations: Connecting space, place and learning, *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 15(3), 349-365 (https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.5107)
Ehrström P. (2020), *Planning with People: Reflections on Participation and Learning on Deliberative Walks*, in Grummell B. & Finnegan F. (eds), (2020), Doing Critical and Creative Research in Adult Education – Case Studies in Methodology and Theory, Research on The Education and Learning of Adults Vol 9, Leiden: Brill/Sense, 203-216. (https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004420755/BP000024.xml?language=en)
Ehrström P. & Katajamäki H., (2013), *Paikallisuuden ytimessä – Tarkastelussa Vaasan Palosaari,* (In the Heart of Locality: A Study of Palosaari, Vaasa*,* in Luoto I., Katajamäki H. & Lundström L. (Toim.), (2013), Oppiva alue, menestyvä alue – Juhlakirja professori Seija Virkkalan 60-vuotispäiväksi, Acta Wasaensia 275, Aluetiede 12, Vaasa: Vaasan yliopisto/Universitas Wasaensis, 61-79.
Raisio H. & Ehrström P., (2017), Taking Deliberation to the Streets: Reflections on Deliberative Walks, *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (2017), 27-51, (http://ojs.ub.gu.se/ojs/index.php/sjpa/article/view/3517/3383)

Tracing the OECD-Canada Relationship in Adult Education and Literacy and the History of IALS

Maren Elfert (King's College London) & Kjell Rubenson (University of British Columbia)

Key words: IALS; Canada; OECD; literacy.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the OECD and Canada in the conceptualization and implementation of the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), which was conducted as a cooperation between the OECD and Statistics Canada. The history of IALS is important because IALS formed the foundation from which the contemporary hegemonic PISA and PIAAC surveys administered by the OECD emerged. This study contributes to the understanding of how the OECD has built its policy influence through its relationship with specific countries and networks. The story of IALS started in 1976 when the OECD did a country report on adult education for Canada which triggered some headlines. The main contact for the OECD country report was the Canadian Association for Adult Education. In 1984, this organization and their francophone counterpart, ICEA, had conducted a study on adults' participation in education titled "One in every five", finding a low level of literacy skills in a significant proportion of the population. In a similar vein, in 1985, the Southam newspaper chain commissioned a literacy study, "Broken words", which found that 24% of the Canadian adult population were functionally illiterate. As a response to this study, the Canadian government carried out its own survey, LSUDA, the precursor to IALS, launched in 1989 by Statistics Canada. These studies attracted the attention of the OECD, which was brought into IALS as a partner. The initiative and much of the funding and know-how for IALS came from Canada and the United States, and Statistics Canada and Educational Testing Services (ETS) provided the expertise for IALS. The OECD was in charge of recruiting countries, as well as the policy framing and the reports.

We draw on a policy and network ethnography approach (Ball & Bowe, 1991; Dubois, 2009), involving the analysis of policy documents and interviews with key actors involved in the conceptualization and implementation of IALS. In accordance with network ethnography, we trace the connections (such as the strong Nordic connections), events, and funding flows that enabled the OECD-Canada policy initiative, paying "close attention to organizations and actors, and their relations, activities, and histories, within the global education policy field, to the paths and connections that join-up these actors, and to 'situations' and events in which policy knowledge is mobilized and assembled" (Ball, 2016, p. 552).

This study is relevant for several reasons. First, it reveals the sketchiness of policy networks and processes, "linking people together…being at the right place at the right time", as one of our interviewees put it. Second, it shows that the initial push for data came from the NGOs. Those who started the process such as the Canadian Association for Adult Education wanted to put the spotlight on "the educationally disadvantaged adult" (interview), but then literacy was framed in economic terms. The large-scale literacy surveys were exploited politically by different actors to pursue their interests. While at the time of IALS, the statistical-technical side and the political side were separate, under PISA and PIAAC they were combined together under the roof of the OECD. PIAAC became a bureaucratic project rather than a quest for data: "It's not run by science now. It's run by bureaucrats" (interview). Third, this study sheds light on the shifting role of the OECD from a progressive organization to a large bureaucratic apparatus.

Paula Elias (Brock University)

Reading policy through adult learners' experiences: Adult literacy policy as a site of class struggle

Keywords: adult literacy, human capital, learner experience, neoliberal policy, class struggle

Research focus on the impact of a human capital-driven policy in adult literacy. Among the issues highlighted are the existing state policies and practices to deliver and monitor adult learning, which can produce deficit-based understandings of adult learners (Belzer & Grotlüschen, 2022; Belzer & Pickard, 2015; Walker & Smythe, 2020); and the way adult literacy workers are reduced to facilitating employment-based agendas in state-funded literacy programs (Allatt & Tett, 2019; Black & Yasukawa, 2014; Grotlüschen et al., 2019). For adult literacy in Canada, efforts have also been made to understand how the 'rising tide' of national policy attention in the late 20th century has waned into an underfunded, marginal priority for state bodies today (Elfert & Walker, 2020; Hayes, 2013; Smythe, 2015). I problematize this reading by considering how human capital-driven policies are actualized in the everyday experiences of adult literacy learners as expressions of neoliberal capitalist relations that organize their lives.

I draw from findings from a qualitative study completed in Toronto, Canada where I conducted 17 semi-structured interviews in 2021 with adult literacy learners and literacy workers across different Literacy and Basic Skills programs. The study employed an anti-racist, feminist methodology to study literacy from the standpoint of adult learners (Cockburn, 2015; Smith, 1990): a vantage point into a complex of social relations that would reveal the way an ideological mode of learning was produced in their attempts to access and transition from basic literacy to postsecondary education. The study was informed by a feminist and Marxist uptake of historical materialism (Allman, 2007; Bannerji, 2020; Marx, 1978): I understand adult education, the state, and capital to have an inter-constitutive relation that has formed mutually and historically among individual experiences, institutions, and policies within adult literacy (Author, 2025).

I argue that adult learners engage in a reproductive praxis to develop their human capital as they access adult literacy learning. Adults not only expressed desires to develop their knowledge and skills for further education and work, but they did so in a broader context of a state-based Multiculturalism policy that had promised 'barrier-free participation' while also solidifying performance-based austerity measures for state-funded adult literacy programs. I reflect on how adult learners' standpoint unveils human capital-driven adult literacy policy as a site of class struggle that requires a critical response from educators and researchers (Carpenter et al., 2024). Relevance to the field includes considerations about critical strategies for researchers and practitioners to challenge existing adult literacy policies.

Word count (excluding references): 432 words.

References

Allatt, G., & Tett, L. (2019). Adult literacy practitioners and employability skills: Resisting neo-liberalism? *Journal of Education Policy*, *34*(4), 577–594.

Allman, P. (2007). *On Marx: An Introduction to the Revolutionary Intellect of Karl Marx*. BRILL.

Author. (2025).

Bannerji, H. (2020). *The Ideological Condition: Selected Essays on History, Race and Gender*. Brill.

Belzer, A., & Grotlüschen, A. (2022). The imagined learner in adult literacy education policy research: An international comparison. *International Review of Education*, *68*(3), 369–388.

Belzer, A., & Pickard, A. (2015). From Heroic Victims to Competent Comrades. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *65*(3), 250–266.

Black, S., & Yasukawa, K. (2014). The literacy myth continues: Adapting Graff's thesis to contemporary policy discourses on adult 'foundation skills' in Australia. *Critical Studies in Education*, *55*(2), 213–228.

Carpenter, S., Gardiner Milln, D., Connauton, J., Woodman, L., Brown, M. G.-K., Mora Rivera, W. J., Mirikarbasaki, F., & Ehsan, A. (2024). Difficult dreams: Unpacking the mythologies of human capital. *Sisyphus: Journal of Education*, *12*(1), 37–58.

Cockburn, C. (2015). Standpoint theory. In S. Mojab (Ed.), *Marxism and Feminism* (pp. 331–346). Zed Books Ltd.

Elfert, M., & Walker, J. (2020). The rise and fall of adult literacy: Policy lessons from Canada. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *11*(1), 109–125.

Grotlüschen, A., Thériault, V., Nienkemper, B., & Capstick, T. (2019). Critical viewpoints on adult literacy practices at the time of PIAAC. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *38*(4), 361–365.

Hayes, B. (2013). Shifting priorities: Federal literacy policy since 2006. *Northern Public Affairs*, 38–43.

Marx, K. (1978). The German Ideology: Part I. In R. C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (2nd ed., pp. 146–200). W.W. Norton & Company.

Smith, D. E. (1990). *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. Northeastern University Press.

Smythe, S. (2015). Ten Years of Adult Literacy Policy and Practice in Canada: Literacy Policy Tensions and Workarounds. *Language and Literacy*, *17*(2), 4–21.

Walker, J., & Smythe, S. (2020). The (Un)deserving adult: Examining British Columbia's adult basic education policy. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *52*(2), 195–214.

International comparison of foundational skills: What do we learn from PIAAC?

Anke Grotlüschen[1], Saida Essert[1], Nathan Breznau[2], Claudia Kulmus[1]

[1] University of Hamburg, [2] DIE Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung

The idea of the symposium is to use the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) discourse, engage scholars with it, and encourage co-operation across countries. The recent PIAAC showed negative skills developments in many countries (OECD, 2024). Some are difficult to explain, like in Austria. Others have been expected over the years, as in the USA. The trend between 2012 and 2023 reveals how countries and societies have changed in the past ten years. Crises have affected Adult Learning and Education, democracies got under pressure from the far right, and the composition of many societies changed: We are globally ageing societies with a substantial need for lifelong learning, and we live in highly diverse societies. The symposium tries to discuss findings based on large-scale assessment of basic competences and relates them to changes in societies.

The discussant is invited to comment from a qualitative and theory-driven perspective.

Chair: from the presenters/discussants

Keywords: Adult Competencies; Literacy; Large-Scale Assessment; PIAAC

1. A nod and a glance towards adults with low skills in setting National Adult Literacy agendas

With the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Education 2016 to 2026, Germany put the development of policies supporting adults with low skills at the center of the national education agendas. Understanding who low-literate adults are, using representative sources of information, is fundamental for unbiased and effective policy making and programs designed for adults with weak literacy skills (Grotlueschen et al., 2016). The National Decade Plan, borrowing policies from the National Plans of France, England (UK), and Ireland, intended to include the latest effective strategies and policies to raise reading and writing competences, as well as the level of basic education, of adults in Germany. Critical oversight was a glance towards the composition of the population of adults with low skills in Germany, vis-à-vis these populations in the countries from where the policies were borrowed.

Schreiber-Barsch (2010) and colleagues purport that policy borrowing is often used for an "ideology of justification" of [country's] own progressiveness (Günther 1982; p. 299) without an adequate, further integration of foreign research findings and their critical comparison with the domestic status quo (Knoll 1980, p. 12). A national contextualisation and a critical examination of the comparative conditions usually remain – and this far less prominently – in the niches of national discourse (Schreiber-Barsch 2010, p. 19).

Using 2012 data from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), we examine the characteristics of adults with low skills in Germany, France, England (UK), and Ireland that should have shaped the 2016-2026 National Decade Plan. As the Plan approaches its conclusion in 2026, the latest PIAAC results from 2023 offer valuable guidance for the strategy and policy development beyond 2026.

2. Literacy Skills of Immigrants: Further Education, Language and Parenthood in PIAAC Countries

The number of foreign-born migrants in the world is at an all-time high. With an increasing number consisting of displaced persons, thus greater numbers of women, many with
children. These migrants are often lower in human capital ('cognitive skills') than their native-born peers. Lower levels of literacy for example puts them at higher risk of struggling to successfully integrate socially, parent effectively, and integrate in the labor market.
Studies long demonstrated that participation in adult education and learning ('further education') can reduce these risks. Here we test how much further education can reduce
these risks at the intersection of being foreign-born, a mother and a non-native speaker. We run various linear regression models on literacy measured in the Cycle 2 PIAAC data from 2022-23 in 28 countries. We decompose how much adult education and learning can
compensate for skill disadvantages, and why. Using our estimates we simulate how much each society would gain using their true populations of immigrants, based on our estimated
average treatment effects.

3. PIAAC in Times of right-wing Populism

A look back in time reveals that the OECD world in 2012 was wealthier and more peaceful, albeit less vegan and probably less diverse. The voter shares of right-wing parties were negligible, and we did not yet know what Fake News or Anti-Vaccinationism was. Democracy was not under threat, civic or health literacy received

little attention, and major international discourses focused on employment (Commission of the European Communities, 2000). Literacy research was dominantly qualitative and highly visible (Hamilton & Barton, 2000), (Thériault, 2016), and the ESREA Triennial in Maynooth in 2016 saw an intense literacy discourse. The German discourse continued with Level-One surveys that reveal how difficult it is for struggling readers to critically scrutinize information. Distinguishing between disinformation and serious information is a highly literacy-related activity. We thus assume that low literate subpopulations could become a target for right-wing populists and their disinformation activities.

By comparing the two PIAAC cycles, this presentation asks for the relation of populism, as operationalized in voter shares for right-wing parties, with literacy skills, adult education and political efficacy. A first glance allows us to see how relevant literacy is for democracies.

Discussant: N.N., qualitative researcher in the wider area of adult literacies and languages research

References

Commission of the European Communities. (2000). *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*. https://uil.unesco.org/document/european-communities-memorandum-lifelong-learning-issued-2000

Grotlüschen, A. et al. (2016), “Adults with Low Proficiency in Literacy or Numeracy”, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 131, OECD Publishing, Paris

Günther, Ute (u.a. 1982). Erwachsenenbildung als Gegenstand der internationalen Diskussion. Köln.

Hamilton, M., & Barton, D. (2000). The international Adult Literacy Survey: What does it really measure? *International Review of Education/ Internationale Zeitschrift Für Erziehungswissenschaft*, *46*(5), 377–389.

Knoll, Joachim H. (1980). Bildung international: internationale Erwachsenenbildung und vergleichende Erwachsenenbildungsforschung. Grafenau/Württ.: expert Verl.

OECD. (2024). *Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World? Survey of Adult Skills 2023. OECD skills studies*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/b263dc5d-en

Schreiber-Barsch, Silke (2010): Internationale und vergleichende Erwachsenenbildung Enzyklopädie Erziehungswissenschaft Online, Fachgebiet: Erwachsenenbildung, DOI 103262/EEO16100139

Thériault, V. (2016). Literacy mediation as a form of powerful literacies in community-based organisations working with young people in a situation of precarity.

Ethnography and Education, *11*(2), 158–173.
https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2015.1101384

ESREA Policy Studies in Adult Education (PSAE) 2026, Hamburg, Germany

Writer: Satu Heimo

Title: The Aims, Autonomy and Critical Thinking of Projectified Popular Education in Finland

Keywords: Popular education; Project; Theory of Practice Architectures; Autonomy

Institutional autonomy and promoting critical thinking have been characteristics for Nordic popular education, but project-based political guidance has destabilized these principles. The aim of this paper is to analyze how projects mold the aims of popular education through project practices. Research questions consider what kind of aims are manifested in popular education projects, and if and how institutional autonomy and critical thinking still exist. This critical case study is based on three Finnish popular education projects in which the researcher carried out action research. Researcher analyzed the project applications and final reports using the theory of practice architectures. Findings show that projects are characterized by many large aims that mirror financiers´ needs. Final result of the project (such as employment) is described in detail before the project has even begun, which is in strong contradiction with the traditional open learning process. Projects´ arrangements such as dependence on funding and temporality diminish institutional autonomy. In short-term, predefined and tight funded projects there is no room for adult learners´ critical consciousness-raising or collective action. Popular education makes efforts to confront societal challenges and crack the arrangements of projects, but the criticism is coincidental, and results remain unclear.

Introduction

> No one's thinking can change if the glass is not cracked. … An important seed can be sowed, and it can later change people´s thinking.

This quote is from the final report of a popular education project and refers to education´s traditional task described as ‘sowing the seed of education’ and providing knowledge that can sometimes change thinking. In this study, the concept of *crack* is expanded to cover the critical actions of popular education, which aim to crack the arrangements of projects. The aim of the study is to analyze how projects mold the aims of popular education (PE) through project practices. Specifically, this study examines how adult education organizations within Nordic popular (adult) education are affected by the neoliberal project-based narratives and terminologies. In this study, I approach popular education as an educative activity that seeks to build more just and equitable social, political, and economic relations for people who lack societal power (see Wiggins 2011) by promoting people´s critical thinking and society-changing actions. Finnish popular education is part of the Nordic model of popular education, which historically draws on the goals of the French Revolution of liberty, equality and fraternity, with strong connection to Nordic welfare systems and Western democracy (Salo & Rönnerman 2014). In Finland interpretations of popular education´s aims vary from developing individuality to strengthening social agency, from civilizing the people to enlightening the social elite (Heikkinen 2019). Today, popular education is organized by institutions named as folk high schools, adult education centres, study centres, summer universities and sports institutions. They all have their unique history, ideological background and societal missions, but this study focuses on their institutional autonomy and possibilities to promote critical thinking.

Adult education has become part of the European Union´s (EU) social, political, economic and labour market policy that largely functions through projects. Public actors such as the state administration and municipalities and private actors such as foundations use projects as vehicles in information guidance. The best practice discourse has spread throughout the education sector and is justified by assuming that best practices would lead to transferable policy solutions (Papanastasiou 2021). A ‘best practice’ in adult education is usually a tool, method or model that is claimed to promote learning, empowerment or

employability of 'people in need'. The neoliberalistic policy paradigm has reshaped adult education, shifting its priorities towards measurable outcomes at the expense of its previous rich tradition aimed at empowerment and civic engagement (Clancy, James & Zarifis 2025).

In Finland, state´s financial support has guaranteed the stabilization and expansion of popular education (Harju et al. 2019), but due to public funding, their institutional autonomy has also been questioned, when success in funding competition requires a product-oriented and marketing mindset, which is hardly combined with traditional ideologies (Heikkinen 2019). The contradictions between popular education and the state have been called 'in and against' paradox of education (Österborg Wiklund 2023). Popular education may choose to work 'inside' the state towards social mobility or 'in opposition to' the state towards social mobilization or both alternately (von Kotze, Walters & Luckett 2016).

The aim of this paper is to analyze how projects mold the aims of popular education through project practices. Research questions consider what kind of aims are manifested in popular education projects, and if and how autonomy and critical thinking still exist. The study is one part of a doctoral dissertation on the projectification of Nordic popular adult education. This critical case study research is based on three PE projects arranged during the years 2017–2022, where the researcher used an action research approach. In this part-study, the primary data are the project applications and final reports that are analyzed using the theory of practice architectures.

Autonomy and Critical Thinking in Finnish Popular Education

Finland belongs to the tradition of the Nordic popular education, also named as *folkbildning* (SWE). Popular education was established in Finland at the end of the 19th century, when the Finnish-speaking rural population formed a public, debating civic community. Gustavsson (1992) describes Nordic popular education as a lifelong process, where self-directive humans purposefully and consciously function as their own educators and educatees within their cultural and social contexts and reflect their learning and experiences collectively and alone. Historically, popular education has been considered beneficial to individuals, community and nation as it promotes democracy, equality, and the development of consciousness and morality (Heikkinen 2019).

Direct translation from the Finnish term *vapaa sivistystyö* is free edification (or cultivation) work. **Freedom** is also a fundamental value for Finnish popular education. In research, the concept of freedom is usually distinguished between a positive and a negative concept, the former referring to the freedom of self-realization and freedom *to* something, and the latter referring to the absence of obstacles and freedom *from* something (Berlin 1958). In addition, the experience of freedom always occurs *in relation* to something, and therefore individuals or institutions can ever be completely autonomous and free, as they are in relation to each other, society and history (Tuomisto 2003, see Donne 1624). In Finland, freedom has been associated both with institutions and individuals. **Autonomy** is a value that is described with words such as *independence, self-determination, self-reliance*, and *freedom of choice* (Loukola 1995). Autonomy can be viewed from an ideological or economic perspective, focusing on values, the independent definition of tasks, and pedagogical freedom, or on issues related to resources, competence, and responsibilities (Harju et al. 2019). In Finland, institutional or pedagogical autonomy has meant freedom to decide education´s programs and methods based on institutions´ own values and goals, considering their possible ideological ties to settlement movement, religion, or labour movement (Alanen 1970). The self-worth and free-goal nature of popular education are dimensions of freedom, the opposite of which are externally controlled, instrumental or utilitarian education (Tuomisto 2003).

Paolo Freire (1970) was a Brazilian educator that built the starting point of popular education and critical pedagogy that reimagines teaching as a collaborative practice of liberation and empowerment rather than transmission of knowledge, but similar objectives were also discussed in Finland – forty years earlier. Liberal politician and philosopher Zachris Castrén believed that educating **critical thinking** would equalize society. Castrén (1929) stated that popular education should awaken and promote adults' voluntary effort for self-education that deepens and broadens their knowledge and redefines their emotional life. Adults should foster themselves into educated persons and responsible members of society (ibid.). Essential for both thinkers were the importance of developing adults' critical thinking and opening up new thought horizons. In addition, popular education has highlighted communal learning spaces and peer learning, equal dialogue between educators and students, and becoming aware of myths, doctrines and false information (see Borgen 1979; Clancy et al. 2025; Harva 1970). Generally, popular

education has wanted to define itself as being on the side of the 'small person' and the people, promoting second chances and democracy.

Today, The Act on Popular Education (632/1998) legislates that popular education in Finland means voluntary-based non-vocational adult education that has to meet local, regional and national educational needs. Popular education should be accessible and a uniform opportunity for everyone, secured by public authority, to develop themselves without being hindered by wealth:

> The purpose of popular education is to organize education that supports the integrity of society, equality, and active citizenship based on the principle of lifelong learning. The aim of education organized as popular education is to promote the diverse development and well-being of people and the realization of democracy, pluralism, sustainable development, multiculturalism, and internationality. Popular education emphasizes voluntary learning, communality, and inclusion. (Finnish Act on Popular Education, 1998, 1 § 1)

State´s financial support has always meant an internal conflict for popular education. The view of institutional autonomy can be seen as a paradox, as achieving state-determined and law-based societal aims is a condition for funding (Tuomisto 2003; see Gustavsson 1992). Throughout history, the regulation of popular education has increased due to the increasing statutory financial support. In the 1990s, the economic depression, joining the EU, and the law reformation meant a crisis for popular education. Concepts from the commercial field such as product, brand, marketing, and project came into discourse. Popular education started to emphasize efficiency and productivity. In 2015, the European refugee crisis reoriented popular education´s societal task to promote the employability of migrants that were called *the groups at risk of exclusion, the disadvantaged* or *under-represented adults*. This was done through national and international projects.

Methodology

There are three project cases in this research. The actions of the projects took place on different levels of society, but projects had also similarities, such as focus on migrants (see Figure 1). Case 1, *Migrants to work*, was a project that were led by one Finnish study center collaborating with two adult education centres and a trade union. The aim was to support employability, active citizenship and individual responsibility of unemployed migrants through empowerment. In the project, educated migrants were first trained as peer group guides. After the training they coached peer groups where Finnish language and work-life skills were taught to unemployed migrants. Simultaneously, the project trained intercultural skills for two workplaces aiming to influence their willingness and ability to hire migrants.

Case 1: *Migrants to work* Migrants´ Employability Peer learning between adult learners	Case 2: *Let´s talk!* Regional Development Peer learning between locals and professionals	Case 3: *Integration transnationally* Best Practices in Integration Peer learning between adult educators
• Funded by European Social Fund (ESF) • 3 years, funding appr. 350 000 e • Two cities in Finland • Study center, two adult education centres, trade union and employers • **Micro level (local and individual level)**	• Funded by one Finnish foundation • 1,5 years, funding appr. 30 000 e • National • PE association, multiple cities • **Meso level (national and community level)**	• European Social Fund (ESF) • 3 years, funding appr. 300 000 e • International • 3 countries, multiple project organizations (PE, NGO, municipality) • **Macro level (European, international and societal level)**

Figure 1. The three project cases analyzed in the study.

Case 2, *Let´s talk!*, was a project led by a national umbrella association. The aim of the project was to test a new deliberative method for local dialogue and democracy and to support lifelong learning. The project's target group was popular education organizations and residents in municipalities. During the project, six workshops were organized, three of them concerning migrant integration.

Case 3, *Integration transnationally*, was a project lead by a Finnish study center collaborating with two Finnish adult education centres and one rehabilitation association. Together they formed a project organization that had three project partners in Belgium and Sweden. The aim of the project was to promote transnational learning between the three countries. The project aimed to find best practices for migrant integration. The primary target group of the project were professionals from popular education,

NGOs and municipality. Migrants were seen as secondary beneficiaries. The project had transnational visits and online meetings for professionals.

Multiple case studies search for patterns of convergence and divergence allowing to foster immersion in phenomena and improve accuracy and generalization (Takahashi & Araujo 2020). In this critical case study, all levels (micro, meso, macro) of popular education projects are represented. Cases build a general view of projects and their practices. Projects share same features and complement each other by demonstrating that the challenges are not sporadic or only related to certain types of projects. In the three cases the boundary conditions, contents and objectives are close to each other as they are characteristic of project activities and thus also produce certain types of outcomes.

In Cases 1 and 3, the research was carried out as participatory action research. Action research was described as a process where researcher conducted knowledge together with people in an interactive and collaborative problem-solving process combining evidence-based analysis to produce best practices (see Kemmis & McTaggart 1988; Reason & Bradbury 2001). Researcher was involved in all project phases collecting the data, organizing workshops, evaluating and developing best practices and recommendations. In Case 2, researcher worked in a dual role as researcher-developer designing, implementing and evaluating the project (see Adams 2014). According to the reliability of the study, it must be noted that the documents analyzed in Case 2 are written by researcher.

In this article the primary research data are the project applications and final reports of the three projects. Two of the applications and one report are available online, and the others are only available on request. Project applications were all together 118 pages (54 + 9 + 55 pages) and final reports 59 pages (10 + 40 + 9 pages). Researcher´s participation and observations are the secondary data for the study as it cannot be separated from the interpretations. Researcher's active participation in projects can deepen the analysis and tie the data to real events, but it also makes interpretations subjective. The documents have been analyzed using the theory of practice architectures. In the analysis, researcher´s aim was to identify statements that express different ways of talking about aims (sayings – cultural-discursive), implementing them (doings – material-economic), and the relationships that the aims are involved in (relatings – social-political arrangements) (see Kemmis et al. 2014). This allowed examining the practical arrangements that enable and constrain the actions in projects.

In the research, I have followed the principles of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (2026), such as respect for the sovereignty of respondents and the protection of privacy and data. The research focuses on the phenomena and practices of popular education projects; therefore, the projects or the Finnish foundation in Case 2 are not referred to by their real names. All the used citations are translated from Finnish to English by the researcher, and the source is marked with A (project application) or R (final report).

Findings: Cracking the Arrangements of Popular Education Projects

Aims

All projects had two to four official aims. Some of them were concrete, but some were vague, idealistic and ambitious ‘improving the world’. Along with official aims, there were up to dozens of planned and promised actions. Organizations intended to *organize, train, evaluate, develop, recruit* and *produce* during the projects. Project applications were characterized by sales language and using words such as *groundbreaking, trailblazing activities of the project, flexible and cost-effective model,* and *easily repeatable hit product*. Applications must linguistically and structurally correspond to financier´s framework and be appealing, because financier decides ‘who is in and who is out’. Organizations promise ‘the moon from the sky’ just to win the funding competition. With multiple aims in relation to tight funding organizations demonstrate efficiency and value for money in the ethos of neoliberal ideology (see Clancy et al. 2025), even if it is unrealistic.

The cultural-discursive arrangements followed a **process-product-profit -logic**, where projects strived to create and test best practices *(method guide, operating model, European network*), have impact (*new method to influence; support societal decision-making, influence integration legislation*) and make recommendations for the future. European employment or integration policy are not in line with the traditional values or law-based aims of popular education, but the contradictions were ignored. The intrinsic nature of popular education became instrumental: instead of educational open opportunities institutions searched for predefined results, such as employment.

Autonomy

A single project is subject to demands and wishes from many sources. Financers require multiple partners and networking. Rare partners (trade unions or researchers) can be more useful, and their special position is highlighted. **Name-dropping** is a sales tactic. One project mentioned 16 different partners and former projects in its application. Names provide legitimation, orientation in discourse and are used to impress others. However, relationships are not always true or reciprocal: the same collaborators are not returned to in the final reports. In ESF projects there was also a request to consider the horizontal principles of the EU, such as gender sensitivity and sustainability, to receive funding. Organizations promised to adhere to the principles even though the main aim of the projects was something else.

When trying to assess autonomy, it is important to assess the desires and impulses, as well as the long-term motives and goals behind the actions and whether the principles, values and opinions are authentic and truly own (see Loukola 1995). In projects, the institutional autonomy of popular education has changed into financier´s arrangements. The demand of multiple partners, for example, restricts institutions´ autonomy to work pedagogically alone or decide its own aims. Projects can be seen as chains that bind organization to the financier and to the (trans)national ethos of best practices. Organizations change into **smooth operators** that ‘play the game’ of the financier. Neoliberalism can be seen as an external obstacle to institutional autonomy. It has changed popular education in multiple ways, but institutions have also made their own autonomy-reducing decisions. Projects may be a conscious choice to ensure future existence in financially unstable times, but while institutions as smooth operators are able to win the funding competition by embracing trends and a certain vocabulary, they surrender—perhaps unconsciously—to the project logic and then risk losing their identity.

Critical Thinking

Although project documents mainly reflected subordination to project vocabulary and arrangements, final reports also revealed a desire to break them, even though criticism was unusual, slight and hidden. The criticism stems from acting contrary to one's own values and from a desire to defend the traditional aims of popular education. Four types of criticism were found. **Criticism towards project practices** appeared as a protest or cheeky response to the financier, as in this example, written under the ESF horizontal principles section called *The development of intangible products and services*:

> The development of educational services is at the core of intangibility. (Case 1 R)

This sentence is both true and paradoxical: Training and learning are intangible (good), but popular education still needs material—money—to carry out education. In documents, the intangible and tangible needs and aims emphasizing material are larger than describing critically the project pedagogy or values. Financier is interested in marketing, but not about the pedagogy or how the participants are involved. Criticism towards project practices is also negotiation about the meaning of the project: Does education have an instrumental or intrinsic value? Is education really a societal service? In the same project, migrants quit participating because the project did not meet their needs, and its rigid structure and arrangements seemed off-putting:

> At the beginning of the groups, filling out the ESF start-up forms … took a lot of time away from the actual content or group formation. In addition, the issues asked for in the form were difficult to explain in plain language, the questions were also unrelated to the project activities, very personal matters, and the justification that the form still had to be filled out was challenging. … the participants were put in the uncomfortable situation of having to give their personal information to a representative of the organization and not even to an authority, and suspicions and anxiety were not avoided. The ESF start and end forms should therefore definitely be designed differently so that the activities would not be hampered because of them. (Case 1 R)

Projects expanded adult educators´ ethical horizon of understanding and actions as adult educators learned from the students. This can lead to **societal criticism** and a counteract for the employment-based political discussion:

> While working with the target group, the fact became concrete for us that not every one of them is necessarily heading for working life, but rather they consider that their work and responsibilities are in the upbringing and care work done at home. Our society should start to be built in a direction where even those whose main job is to be at home would have opportunities to experience inclusion by participating in the name of the common good in some other way. … Should they even be the target of the Ministry of Employment's measures and clients of the employment office?

> What sense does it make, both for the individual and for society, that a person who does not want and does not have the skills to find employment outside the home, has to go through work practices and periods of supported employment and is worried about possible interruptions in their income (e.g. labour market support), and for whom year after year attempts are made to build a path towards working life that they do not want to enter, finds themselves in such a limbo? (Case 1 R)

This quote shows that the cultural-discursive arrangements in project applications may contain idealistic perceptions or even false assumptions. Participants are assumed to want to work in certain fields or work in general. Migrant mothers may be presented as objects of concern—as passive, non-working caregivers, even though they have socio-cultural and structural reasons for seeking or not seeking employment. Through societal criticism popular education wants to argue that an adult's unwillingness to participate should not prevent them from being full members of society.

Final reports indicate that popular education has a will to criticize the current political discourse. Criticism is a way to defend adult learners and their self-educational aspirations, and it is a result of dialogue with adult learners. But adult learners' voices are not heard unless **institutions act as their advocates**. Through criticism, popular education attempts to break down (crack) the exclusionary structures of project practices and negotiate socio-political arrangements and migrants´ societal position. There is a need and attempt to awaken the global economic and political elite (financiers) and put *solidarity in action* (see von Kotze et al. 2016). In projects, adult educators may strive to implement socially transforming activities, as they have access to agency unlike the objectified participants.

However, adult educators` observations, insights and criticism do not become reality in communities or promote adult learners´ critical thinking or societal awakening during the projects. This leads to **self-criticism**, such as reflections on the role of adult educators and the direction of popular education:

> We ourselves are part of a system that maintains inequality and unsustainable development. But … we are also part of the solution. Educators were seen as activists who should reflect on their own preconceptions. Unlearning, courageous actions, asking difficult questions, and facing facts are also important in future adult education. … Popular education can enable different people to meet, for example through workshops, but at the same time it sets goals related to the demands of the labor market and continuous learning. Who should popular education reach and whose needs should it meet? … it should also strive to reach those who think differently—even 'wrongly'. To quote one local adult educator: No one's thinking can change if the glass is not cracked. … An important seed can be sowed, and it can later change people´s thinking. (Case 2 R)

The last two sentences can also be interpreted as a metaphor of popular education´s task as a societal activist breaching the project arrangements. In the same way that popular education may change the thinking of adult learners by providing knowledge, the projects may try to take a societal stance, act against and make visible societal and financial injustice and deficiency, so that knowledge about it could 'crack' the logic of the arrangements of projects. However, it is unclear whether the criticism in the final reports is in the right place or if it is useful. The courage of popular education might also depend on certain individuals or remain behind the gatekeepers who approve and send forward the final reports.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to analyze how projects mold the aims of popular education through project practices. The results show that projects are characterized by idealism and a massive number of aims. The material-economic arrangements have changed from state supported tax-funded education to earmarked profit responsibility. In short-term projects there is only little room for critical consciousness-raising or collective action which narrows the scope of adult learning and steers it away from its democratic and emancipatory roots (see Clancy et al. 2025). The traditional concepts of popular education are fragmented and autonomy is lost. Adaptive political goals such as employability are emphasized instead of societal change. Learning outcomes are decided from above before the project has even started. Final reports may give criticism towards the societal system and project practices, but it is not systematic, and it remains unclear whether it leads to any change.

Because it is unlikely that society will get rid of project-based work and financing, I give three developmental proposals that suggest how the arrangements of project practices could be developed to increase popular education projects´ inner coherence:

1) Popular education should clarify and make visible values (and the human concept of the learner) with potential partners before signing contracts, and they should consider whether their values conflict with the values of the financier.
2) Projects should prioritize open-ended processes over predefined outcomes. Financiers should develop evaluation criteria that support organizations' self-understanding rather than relying on externally imposed indicators (see Heikkinen 2019). Success should be measured by how projects sustain ongoing development after project funding. Project administration should create possibilities for free association that support the autonomy of popular education.
3) Financiers should open a feedback channel for organizations to record administrative and practical challenges observed in projects. The feedback channel should also include mutual result accountability and monitoring of development, in which the financier should disclose how the challenges have been addressed.

This study contributes to the research field by bringing into the discussion that popular education tries to crack the boundary conditions, arrangements and structures of projects and criticize the prevalent political and financial system. However, its profit is unclear. Project as a tool of neoliberal policy changes the identity of adult education, when institutions must adapt to projects´ rigid structures, language and practices. Projects do not widen the scope for action, but on the contrary, they suppress it. On the other hand, a lack of project funding could mean a total cessation of the popular education activity during the financially unstable times of far-right influenced policy.

References

Adams, D. (2014). First person action research. In D. Coghlan & M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of action research*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446294406

Alanen, A. (1970). Vapaus ja sidonnaisuus vapaassa sivistystyössä. *In:* E. Karjalainen, eds. *Vapaan sivistystyön tavoitteet.* Helsinki: Weilin&Göös, 132–154.

Berlin, I. (1958). *Two Concepts of Liberty*. Oxford.

Borgen, S. (1979). Grundtvig ja Freire. In Pohjoismainen kansanopistoneuvosto. Pohjolan kansanakatemia. *Grundtvig ja kansansivistystyö*. Krause, M. (suomennos). 104–114.

Castrén, Z. (1929/1991). Valtio ja vapaa kansansivistystyö. *In:* R. Aaltonen & J. Tuomisto (eds.), *Valistus, sivistys, kasvatus. Kansanvalistuksesta aikuiskasvatukseen.* Vapaan sivistystyön 32. vuosikirja. Jyväskylä: Kirjastopalvelu. 141–158.

Clancy, S., James, N. & Zarifis, G. (2025). Communal learning spaces for collaborative action: defending adult education in a neoliberal era. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 57:1, 1–6. DOI: 10.1080/02660830.2025.2480444

Donne, J. (1624). *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions.* https://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/meditation17.php

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Continuum.

Gustavsson, B. (1992). *Folkbildningens idéhistoria.* ABF förbundet / Bildningsförlaget. ISBN 918840204 5.

Harju, A., *et al.* (2019). Vapaan sivistystyön oppilaitosmuodot ja ohjaus. In: Pätäri, J., et al. (eds.), *Vapaa sivistystyö eilen, tänään ja huomenna. Vapaan sivistystyön rooli, asema ja merkitys suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa ja koulutusjärjestelmässä.* Helsinki: Vapaa sivistystyö ry. 30–83. ISBN-10: 952-5349-33-0

Heikkinen, A. (2019). Vapaan sivistystyön aatteet ja ideologiat. In: Pätäri, J., et al. (eds.), *Vapaa sivistystyö eilen, tänään ja huomenna. Vapaan sivistystyön rooli, asema ja merkitys suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa ja koulutusjärjestelmässä.* Helsinki: Vapaa sivistystyö ry. 84–139. ISBN-10: 952-5349-33-0

Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The Action Researcher Planner.* (3rd Ed.) Geelong: Deakin University Press.

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. & Nixon, R. (2014). *The Action Research Planner. Doing Critical Participatory Action Research.* Springer.

Loukola, O. (1995). Mitä autonomia on? *Aikuiskasvatus,* 15(3). 164–175, 229. https://doi.org/10.33336/aik.92329

Papanastasiou, N. (2021). Best practice as a governing practice: producing best practice in a European Commission working group. *Journal of Education Policy*, 36:3. 327–348. DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2019.1682680

Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. 2001. (Eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice.* London: Sage.

Salo, P., & Rönnerman, K., (2014). The Nordic Tradition of Educational Action Research. In the light of practice architectures. In: K. Rönnerman & P. Salo (eds.), *Lost in Practice: Transforming Nordic Educational Action Research.* The Netherlands: SensePublishers Rotterdam. 53–71. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-722-3

Takahashi, A.R.W., & Araujo, L. (2020). Case study research: opening up research opportunities. *RAUSP Management Journal*, 55:1. 100–111. DOI 10.1108/RAUSP-05-2019-0109

Tuomisto, J. (2003). Vapauden kaipuu vapaassa sivistystyössä. In: V. Riikonen (eds.), *Valistuksesta tietämysyhteiskuntaan.* Helsinki: Opintotoiminnan Keskusliitto ry. 43–80. ISBN 951-9140-09-3

von Kotze, A., Walters, S., & Luckett, T. (2016). Navigating our way: A compass for popular educators. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 48:1. 96–114. DOI: 10.1080/02660830.2016.1155850

Wiggins, N. (2011). Critical pedagogy and popular education: towards a unity of theory and practice. *Studies in the Education of Adults,* 43:1, 34–49. DOI: 10.1080/02660830.2011.11661602

Österborg Wiklund, S. (2023). In and against global injustice: Decolonising popular education on global development. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 55:1. 5–23. DOI: 10.1080/02660830.2021.1989903

Corporate Employment Structures and the Reproduction of Adult Literacy: A Comparative Analysis of South Korea and Italy

SuhYeon Hwang (Master's Student, Dept. of Education, SNU)

Soonghee Han (Professor, Dept. of Education, SNU)

I. Introduction

Is literacy a fixed skill acquired in childhood, or does it continue to develop throughout adulthood? While education policies in many countries, including South Korea, focus on early education, research and international assessment results indicate that adult literacy is continuously shaped through workplace experiences and lifelong learning opportunities. For example, although South Korea ranks highly in adolescent literacy (PISA), it falls short of the OECD average in adult literacy (PIAAC), suggesting that literacy development is influenced by social and workplace participation that extends beyond formal education.

If adult literacy is shaped by the workplace, working conditions become critically important. Labor markets often exhibit a dual structure comprising large enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), each offering different training opportunities and conditions for skill development (Doeringer & Piore, 1970; OECD, 2020). These structural differences can influence whether adults maintain, improve, or lose their literacy skills over time.

The impact of labor market segmentation on literacy varies by country. This study compares South Korea and Italy, which, despite superficial differences, share an economy numerically dominated by SMEs, similar population sizes, and below-average adult literacy scores (PIAAC). However, the two countries differ in terms of wage structures, union membership rates, and the exclusivity of employment in large enterprises. There have been few studies that directly compare these two cases. Although Oh (2019) conducted a comparative study of the two countries, the study did not examine how workplace structures reproduce adult literacy.

Therefore, this study utilizes data from the second PIAAC survey to analyze how literacy gaps differ between Korea and Italy by age group and employment type. We focus on how labor market institutions and participation in lifelong learning shape these differences.

II. Theoretical Background

1. Literacy and PIAAC

Literacy has traditionally been defined as technical reading and writing skills; however, contemporary scholarship emphasizes that literacy is a social practice shaped by context, institutions, and power relations (Freire, 1970; Street, 1984; Barton & Hamilton, 2012). Recent research indicates that adult literacy is a dynamic concept that evolves through formal education, workplace experience, and non-formal learning (Livingstone, 2001; Reder, 2009). Desjardins (2003) argued that while education plays the most important role in predicting literacy, its effects are mediated by learning in the workplace, at home, and in the community, positioning literacy development as part of a lifelong learning process.

The OECD's PIAAC program reflects this progress by defining literacy as "understanding, evaluating, using, and engaging with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (OECD, 2009, p.9). PIAAC surveys adults aged 16 to 65,

collecting data on literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills, as well as various background variables such as employment and training history, providing data from multiple countries on a 10-year cycle.

2. The Dual Structure of the Labor Market

Doeringer and Fiore (1970) describe a dual structure: an internal labor market within large enterprises with formalized promotion and training systems, and an external market lacking these features. In this perspective, the quality of jobs, promotion, and training opportunities are not simply a reflection of workers' abilities but are institutionally determined. The nature of this segmentation varies depending on national choices and socioeconomic contexts (Berger & Piore, 1980).

Labor market segmentation has taken on a modern dimension that extends beyond firm size to include atypical and precarious employment (Hudson, 2007). Studies indicate that firm size is closely related to job quality; however, atypical employment can encompass both high-quality and low-quality jobs (Kalleberg, 2000; Kumaş et al., 2014).

Meanwhile, the case of Italy demonstrates that just because a labor market and industrial structure are segmented does not mean that one segment is always a disadvantaged periphery. Piore and Sabel (1984) proposed that networks of SMEs in industrial districts exhibit "flexible specialization" and offer an alternative to mass production centered on large enterprises. Thus, while the Korean economy is dominated by *chaebols*, Italy's SMEs serve as a driving force for innovation and economic vitality, highlighting the diverse aspects of segmentation.

3. Workplace Environment and the Reproduction of Literacy

Labor market segmentation is reflected not only in wages and employment stability but also in technology utilization, educational opportunities, and rewards for skill improvement. First, the frequency of using literacy skills in the workplace is crucial. Research has shown that the "use it or lose it" principle applies to adult literacy as well, revealing that skills deteriorate if they are not used (Bynner & Parsons, 1998; OECD, 2016). Longitudinal data indicate that skills can improve even in adulthood if the work environment promotes skill utilization (Hanushek et al., 2025), and it has been found that skill utilization is not solely a matter of individual will but is largely influenced by the workplace environment (OECD, 2026).

Second, educational opportunities are distributed unequally. Institutional differences in resources, incentives, and access to national education programs have led to a persistent educational/training gap between large enterprises and SMEs in Korea (OECD, 2020; Fleckenstein et al., 2024). In fact, inequality persists because individuals with higher literacy levels are more likely to participate in training (Gauly & Lechner, 2019).

Third, the rewards of improved literacy (e.g., wage premiums) vary depending on the country and industrial structure. Hanushek et al. (2015) found that the returns to skill are higher in Korea than in Italy; however, in Korea, factors such as firm affiliation and tenure play a greater role in wage determination than skill itself (Lee et al., 2025). Therefore, even in places with high returns on skills, institutional factors can limit individuals' motivation to learn.

Taking these mechanisms into account, large enterprises in Korea promote the maintenance and development of literacy through complex job duties, systematic training, and structured environments, whereas dispersed and resource-constrained SMEs may not be able to do so.

4. Korea and Italy: An Institutional Comparison

In both South Korea and Italy, SMEs account for a significant portion of the economic structure. In both countries, 99.9% of all businesses are SMEs, and employment is also driven by SMEs (Ministry of SMEs and Startups, 2025; ISTAT, 2025; OECD, 2023). Furthermore, both countries scored below the OECD average in adult literacy on the PIAAC (OECD, 2013; OECD, 2024). In the most recent survey (where the OECD average was 260 points), South Korea scored 249 points and Italy 245 points. They also share similar demographic characteristics: Korea has a population of approximately 51.1 million and Italy has approximately 58.9 million, with both facing severe challenges of low birth rates and an aging population.

However, there are also significant differences between the two countries. First, there is a gap in wages and welfare. In South Korea, workers at large enterprises enjoy a significant wage premium compared to those at SMEs, and SMEs struggle to attract labor due to low productivity and wages (OECD, 2022). In contrast, Italy mitigates wage disparities by guaranteeing sector-specific minimum wages through nationwide collective bargaining agreements, regardless of company size.

Second, the scope of labor union coverage. In Korea, unionization rates are low and concentrated in large enterprises, whereas in Italy, unionization rates are high, and the scope of collective agreements is broad, ensuring that SME workers are also protected (OECD and AIAS, 2025; Fleckenstein et al., 2024). Italy's unionization rate is 30.2%, and 100% of workers covered by collective agreements have the right to collective bargaining (OECD and AIAS, 2025). In Italy, performance-based pay and other incentives are further regulated through company and regional agreements (Eurofound, 2024).

Third, the exclusivity of employment in large enterprises. In Korea, employment in large enterprises is highly restricted, and workers selected early in their careers experience long-term employment and internal promotion. The high wages and stability of large enterprises exacerbate the gap with SMEs. In Italy, large enterprises and SMEs coexist, but SMEs possess their own competitive strengths (Piore & Sabel, 1984; Becattini, 2017; Pietrobelli, 1998).

A key point is that while labor market segmentation in Korea is driven by firm size, in Italy it is more closely linked to stable inclusion in the labor market and welfare system (Ferrera, 2005). Consequently, the pathways and intensity of literacy reproduction through employment structures differ between the two countries.

In summary, while both countries share commonalities, they differ in terms of wage and welfare gaps, union coverage, and the employment structure of large enterprises. Consequently, the conditions and patterns of literacy reproduction by employment type vary from country to country. Accordingly, this study addresses the following:

1. How do literacy gaps by employment type manifest in Korea and Italy?
2. How do these gaps vary across age groups?
3. How do patterns of participation in non-formal education differ by employment type in Korea and Italy, and how are these related to literacy gaps?

III. Research Methodology

This study utilizes data from the second cycle data of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), conducted by the OECD in 2022–2023. PIAAC assesses literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills among adults aged 16 to 65, while also collecting data on background variables. This comparative analysis focuses solely on South Korea and Italy, including 6,198 South Korean respondents and 4,847 Italian respondents.

The analysis was performed in R Studio (2025.05.1+513), and Rrepest was used to account for PIAAC's complex sampling design and repeated weights. Literacy scores were expressed as 10 plausible values in accordance with PIAAC's recommendations to ensure accurate estimation.

The dependent variable is the literacy score (PVLIT@). The primary independent variable, employment type, was classified into (1) employees of large enterprises, (2) employees of small and medium-sized enterprises(SMEs), (3) self-employed individuals, and (4) non-respondents, based on self-employment status and firm size. First, self-employment status was determined based on D2_Q04, which asks whether the respondent is an employee or self-employed. For the question asking about the number of employees at the current workplace (D2_Q07a), respondents who answered 1 (1–10 employees), 2 (11–49 employees), or 3 (50–249 employees) were classified as SME employees, while those who answered 4 (250–499 employees), 5 (500–999 employees), or 6 (1,000 or more employees) were coded as large enterprise employees. Groups not falling into the above categories were classified as the non-response group. Non-formal education participation was measured by the overall participation rate in 12 months (NFE12C2) and the participation rate for job-related purposes (NFE12JRC2). Age was classified into five age groups (AGEG10LFS): 24 years old and under, 25–34 years old, 35–44 years old, 45–54 years old, and 55 years old and over.

Given the complex survey design, weighted averages and standard errors were calculated. Differences between groups were calculated using methods appropriate for complex samples, and t-tests were conducted to assess these differences.

IV. Results

1. Literacy Gaps by Employment Type

We examined literacy scores by employment type in both Korea and Italy. In Korea, employees of large enterprises had the highest average literacy scores (269.2), followed by employees of SMEs (248.7), non-respondents (247.8), and self-employed individuals (238.9). Large enterprise employees scored significantly higher than all other groups, with the largest gap observed against the self-employed (30.3 points, t = 9.99, $p < .001$), followed by non-respondents (21.4 points, t = 7.34, $p < .001$) and SME employees (20.5 points, t = 7.75, $p < .001$). The difference between SME employees and the self-employed was also significant (9.8 points, t = 4.3, $p < .001$), whereas the difference between SME employees and non-respondents was negligible and not statistically significant.

In Italy, large enterprise employees also scored the highest (259.0), but the gaps between large enterprise employees, SME employees (251.4), and the self-employed (256.6) were small and not statistically significant. Instead, the most pronounced divide appeared between these three labor market participant groups and non-respondents (235.0): large enterprise employees scored 24.0 points higher than non-respondents (t = 5.81, $p < .001$), the self-employed 21.6 points higher (t = 6.11, $p < .001$), and SME employees 16.4 points higher (t = 7.02, $p < .001$).

Employment Type	Korea	Italy
	Average literacy score (standard error)	Average literacy score (standard error)
Employees of Large Enterprises	269.22 (2.29)	259.03 (3.53)
Employees of SMEs	248.72 (1.30)	251.37 (2.38)
Self-employed	238.93 (1.92)	256.58 (3.45)
Non-respondents	247.83 (1.68)	234.99 (1.73)

Table 1. Average literacy scores and standard errors by employment type in Korea and Italy

Employment Type	Korea		Italy	
	Diff (SE)	t	Diff (SE)	t
Employees of Large Enterprises – Employees of SMEs	20.50 (2.65)	7.75 ***	7.66 (4.57)	1.68
Employees of Large Enterprises – Self-employed	30.29 (3.03)	9.99 ***	2.45 (4.80)	0.51
Employees of Large Enterprises – Non-respondents	21.39 (2.92)	7.34 ***	24.04 (4.14)	5.81 ***
Employees of SMEs – Self-employed	9.78 (2.27)	4.3 ***	-5.21 (3.50)	-1.49
Employees of SMEs – Non-respondents	0.89 (2.10)	0.42	16.38 (2.33)	7.02 ***
Self-employed – Non-respondents	-8.89 (2.77)	-3.21 **	21.59 (3.54)	6.11 ***

Table 2. Mean Differences and Standard Errors in Literacy Scores by Employment Type in Korea and Italy (*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001)

2. Gaps by Age Group

In Korea, workers at large enterprises consistently scored higher than other groups across all age groups, with the gap being largest among the core working-age group (25–54 years old). The difference between workers at large and SMEs peaked at 19.1 points in the 35–44 age group, while the gap narrowed among the older group (55 years and older).

However, a notable discrepancy emerges between the overall and age-specific results. In Table 2, the differences between SME employees and the self-employed (9.78 points, p < .001) and between the self-employed and non-respondents (−8.89 points, p < .01) are statistically significant at the aggregate level. Yet when examined within each age cohort (see Appendix), neither comparison reaches statistical significance in any of the five age groups.

In Italy, analysis by age group revealed significant literacy gaps between labor market participants (large enterprises, SMEs, and the self-employed) and non-respondents, particularly among adults aged 25 and older. Within the labor market participants, differences by employment type were smaller and not statistically significant.

Age Group	Employees of Large Enterprises – Employees of SMEs		Employees of Large Enterprises – Self-employed		Employees of Large Enterprises – Non-respondents	
	Diff (SE)	t	Diff (SE)	t	Diff (SE)	t
24 and under	11.74 (13.60)	0.86	32.53 (24.57)	1.32	4.44 (13.84)	0.32
25–34	15.49 (4.24)	3.66 ***	17.98 (7.85)	2.29 *	19.80 (5.96)	3.32 ***
35–44	19.11 (4.75)	4.02 ***	17.95 (5.66)	3.17 **	25.59 (6.11)	4.19 ***
45–54	17.81 (4.84)	3.68 ***	16.71 (5.08)	3.29 **	23.01 (5.44)	4.23 ***
55 plus	6.45 (6.99)	0.92	4.60 (7.42)	0.62	11.82 (7.25)	1.63

Table 3. Key Table of Score Differences by Employment Type and Age Group in Korea (See Appendix for full details) (*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001)

Age Group	Employees of Large Enterprises – Non-respondents		Employees of SMEs – Non-respondents		Self-employed – Non-respondents	
	Diff (SE)	t	Diff (SE)	t	Diff (SE)	t
24 and under	1.95 (11.57)	0.17	-7.63 (5.15)	-1.48	-2.20 (12.83)	-0.17
25–34	42.77 (8.64)	4.95 ***	26.16 (5.30)	4.94 ***	36.11 (7.33)	4.93 ***
35–44	34.93 (9.19)	3.80 ***	24.83 (5.81)	4.27 ***	31.86 (8.16)	3.90 ***
45–54	40.25 (6.76)	5.96 ***	31.75 (4.50)	7.05 ***	34.61 (5.78)	5.98 ***
55 plus	23.86 (7.09)	3.37 ***	17.56 (5.00)	3.51 ***	23.63 (6.50)	3.64 ***

Table 4. Key Table of Score Differences by Employment Type and Age Group in Italy (See Appendix for full details) (*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001)

3. Participation in Non-formal Education and Literacy

Participation in non-formal education was associated with higher literacy scores in both countries, though the strength and statistical significance of this association varied by employment type. In Korea, overall participation rates in non-formal education were low across all groups, ranging from 11.1% among the self-employed to 17.4% among large enterprise employees. The literacy gap between participants and non-participants was statistically significant for three of the four employment types: large enterprise employees (15.3 points, t = 2.70, p <.01), SME employees (11.1 points, t = 3.65, p < .001), and non-respondents (11.1 points, t = 2.56, p < .05). However, among the self-employed, the gap of 9.3 points was not statistically significant.

In Italy, participation rates were higher, exceeding 50% among large enterprise employees and approximately 31% among SME employees and the self-employed, while non-respondents had the lowest rate at 12.1%. The literacy gap between participants and non-participants was statistically significant and substantively large across all four employment types (p < .001). The largest gap appeared among non-respondents (35.1 points, t = 7.47), followed by SME employees (30.8 points, t = 7.48), the self-employed (27.3 points, t = 4.20), and large enterprise employees (26.5 points, t = 4.15). Notably, the pattern in Italy is the reverse of Korea: the gap was largest among those outside the labor market and smallest among large enterprise employees, reinforcing the finding that the critical divide in Italy lies in labor market participation rather than firm size.

Employment Type	Overall Non-formal Education Participation Rate (%) (SE)		Participation Rate for Job-Related Reasons (%) (SE)	
	Korea	Italy	Korea	Italy
Employees of Large Enterprises	17.4 (1.69)	51.6 (3.80)	65.1 (5.26)	90.2 (2.96)
Employees of SMEs	15.9 (0.76)	31.0 (1.85)	68.1 (2.52)	91.5 (1.56)
Self-employed	11.1 (1.19)	31.6 (2.87)	61.5 (5.39)	91.5 (2.36)
Non-respondents	14.1 (0.97)	12.1 (1.09)	50.0 (3.68)	61.8 (4.12)

Table 5. Non-formal education participation rates in Korea and Italy

Employment Type	Mean of Non-participants (SE)	Mean of Participants (SE)	Difference (Participants – non-participants)

	Korea	Italy	Korea	Italy	Korea		Italy	
					Diff (SE)	t	Diff (SE)	t
Employees of Large Enterprises	266.57 (2.47)	245.37 (4.77)	281.81 (5.10)	271.84 (4.67)	15.25 (5.64)	2.70 **	26.47 (6.37)	4.15 ***
Employees of SMEs	246.93 (1.39)	241.82 (2.52)	257.98 (2.87)	272.57 (3.66)	11.05 (3.02)	3.65 ***	30.75 (4.11)	7.48 ***
Self-employed	237.90 (1.95)	247.98 (4.44)	247.17 (5.19)	275.23 (4.84)	9.27 (5.20)	1.78	27.25 (6.49)	4.20 ***
Non-respondents	244.52 (1.75)	227.53 (1.88)	255.59 (4.10)	262.64 (4.53)	11.07 (4.32)	2.56 *	35.11 (4.70)	7.47 ***

Table 6. Average literacy scores by participation in non-formal education, by employment type, in Korea and Italy (*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001)

V. Conclusion and Discussion

This study analyzed how adult literacy gaps vary by employment type in Korea and Italy using data from the second PIAAC survey. Specifically, it compared the average literacy scores of four groups—large enterprise employees, SME employees, the self-employed, and non-respondents—examined differences across age groups, and investigated the relationship between participation in non-formal education and literacy.

In Korea, large enterprise workers demonstrated higher literacy levels than all other groups, and this gap was consistently maintained across the 25–54 age range. In Italy, the gap among large enterprise workers, SME workers, and the self-employed was relatively small, with the most pronounced gap appearing between these three groups and non-respondents. In both countries, participation in non-formal education was highest among large enterprise workers and was associated with higher literacy, though the nature of this association differed structurally between the two countries.

These findings cannot be viewed as simple score differences; rather, they indicate that the labor markets of the two countries organize literacy in fundamentally different ways. In Korea, the gap between large enterprise workers and other groups already appears in the 25–34 age group and persists at a similar level through the 35–44 and 45–54 age groups. Its persistence across the core working-age population suggests that the workplace environment in large enterprises continuously maintains the literacy advantage established during the initial selection process, through the combined effects of skill utilization frequency, systematic training opportunities, and the conditions for literacy practice provided by the organizational environment itself.

Importantly, the age-cohort analysis reveals that the overall literacy gaps among SMEs, the self-employed, and non-respondents in Korea are largely artifacts of differing age compositions rather than genuine employment-type effects, a manifestation of Simpson's Paradox. This finding sharpens the interpretation of Korea's labor market segmentation: the fundamental divide is not a gradient across all employment types but a binary distinction between large enterprises and all other groups. Once the confounding effect of age is removed, workers outside large enterprises exhibit comparable literacy levels regardless of whether they are employed in SMEs, self-employed, or outside the labor market. This reinforces the argument that large enterprises serve as uniquely privileged spaces for maintaining literacy in Korea's labor market.

Italy reveals a different structure. The gap between large enterprise employees and the self-employed is only 2.45 points, and the gap with SME employees is also smaller than in Korea. Instead, a consistent gap of 16 to 24 points appears between the three labor market participant groups and non-respondents, suggesting that the core axis of literacy gaps in Italy lies not in company size but in labor market

participation. Although both countries exhibit a gap, in Korea it appears between large enterprises and SMEs, whereas in Italy it appears between labor market participants and non-participants. In Korea, enterprise type determines the trajectory of literacy; in Italy, labor market participation itself serves as the decisive turning point. The insider-outsider divide in European welfare systems analyzed by Ferrera (2005) is thus replicated in the domain of literacy.

These structural differences cannot be explained by current institutional conditions alone; they must be understood through the distinct industrialization paths of each country. Korea's industrialization was state-led, with successive military governments from the 1960s onward concentrating resources on a small number of conglomerates to promote export-led growth, giving rise to the *chaebols*. Under strategic state support, the *chaebols* grew by leading industries and later expanded into high-tech sectors like semiconductors, forming a structure in which numerous subsidiaries and subcontractors are vertically linked beneath them. These conglomerates evolved into privileged spaces entangled with national strategy, absorbing highly educated labor through mass recruitment from elite universities and retaining it through long-term employment within internal labor markets. Movement from SMEs to large enterprises was effectively blocked, creating an extremely concentrated labor market structure. The 'large enterprise literacy premium' identified in this study is a manifestation of this historical structure, produced by three condensed mechanisms: selective entry concentrating highly educated talent in large enterprises, post-entry environmental maintenance through systematic training and complex job duties, and gap entrenchment due to limited mobility. Rather than reflecting differences in individual effort and ability, this gap is the result of the "winner-takes-all" labor market structure created by Korea's industrialization being projected onto the literacy domain.

Italy's industrialization followed a fundamentally different path. While large enterprises such as FIAT and ENI grew primarily in the northern and central regions, a completely different pattern unfolded in the regions of Emilia, Veneto, and Tuscany—the Third Italy. The numerous SMEs in these regions grew organically through the accumulation of local technical expertise and mutual cooperation within the local community, rather than through strategic state allocation. This is the model Piore & Sabel (1984) presented as "flexible specialization," Becattini (2017) mentioned as the "Marshallian industrial district," and Pietrobelli (1998) demonstrated to have secured competitiveness on par with large enterprises. Thanks to this trajectory, SME employment in Italy has functioned as an alternative pathway for generating independent innovation and added value, rather than simply being the result of failure to enter large enterprises. This historical context explains why the literacy gap among large enterprises, SMEs, and the self-employed in Italy is not significant: SMEs function as spaces with their own independent learning ecosystems. Furthermore, Italian NCBAs guaranteeing basic wage levels structurally mitigate the large enterprise employment premium compared to Korea.

Therefore, the literacy gap patterns observed in this study do not simply reflect current institutional differences; rather, they are the result of the structural legacy of each country's industrialization over the past half-century being projected onto the micro-level indicator of adult literacy. Korea's state-*chaebol*-collusive industrialization produced a hierarchical division of literacy centered on large enterprises, while Italy's industrial-district-centered path produced an inclusion-exclusion division where labor market participation—rather than firm size—is the key determinant.

The analysis of non-formal education reveals a dual implication: it can serve as either a mechanism to mitigate inequality or to reproduce it. In both countries, participants demonstrated higher literacy levels than non-participants. However, it is difficult to interpret this directly as evidence that non-formal education improves literacy, because as Gauly & Lechner (2019) demonstrated using PIAAC-L data, a self-selection effect is simultaneously at play. Above all, the contextual frameworks within which non-formal education operates differ structurally between the two countries. In Korea, the literacy gap associated with non-formal education participation was largest among large enterprise workers and smallest among the self-employed, suggesting that education exerts a stronger retention effect when combined with a work environment directly linked to literacy utilization—reflecting a virtuous cycle of skill use, training, and organizational environment within large enterprises. The fact that the

effectiveness of non-formal education varies by employment type suggests that simply increasing the quantity of educational opportunities is insufficient to bridge the gap.

In Italy, this gap was largest among non-respondents. Even among those outside the labor market, the group with access to non-formal education showed a stark difference in literacy compared to the majority without it. This reveals that non-formal education can serve as a powerful buffer for excluded groups while simultaneously becoming the greatest source of exclusion when labor market access itself is blocked.

These findings suggest that lifelong learning policies must move beyond the mere provision of programs to reimagine the structure of learning opportunities itself. In Korea, the priority is reducing the training gap between large enterprises and others by expanding public learning infrastructure accessible to workers outside the *chaebol* system and designing institutional frameworks that ensure equitable distribution of training opportunities regardless of company size. In Italy, the priority is increasing learning access for groups outside the labor market who, lacking union protection and collective bargaining coverage, are likely excluded from the information, financial resources, and institutional networks necessary to access learning. If the argument of this study—that literacy is not fixed once formed in school but is continuously reproduced through workplace and labor market participation—is correct, then lifelong learning policy must shift from the question of 'what to teach adults' to the question of 'what employment structures and learning environments maintain and develop adult competencies.'

References

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (2012). *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one community*. Routledge.

Becattini, G. (2017). The Marshallian industrial district as a socio-economic notion. *Revue d'économie industrielle, 157*, 13-32.

Berger, S., & Piore, M. J. (1980). *Dualism and Discontinuity in Industrial Societies*. Cambridge University Press.

Bynner, J., & Parsons, S. (1998). *Use it or lose it? The impact of time out of work on literacy and numeracy skills*. Basic Skills Agency.

Desjardins, R. (2003). Determinants of literacy proficiency: A lifelong-lifewide learning perspective. *International Journal of Educational Research, 39*(3), 205–245.

Doeringer, P. B., & Piore, M. J. (1970). *Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis*. Harvard Univ., Cambridge, Mass.; Massachusetts Inst. of Tech., Cambridge.

Eurofound (2024, November). *Working life country profile for Italy.* https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/countries/italy/collective-bargaining

Ferrera, M. (2005). *The boundaries of welfare: European integration and the new spatial politics of social protection.* Oxford University Press.

Fleckenstein, T., Lee, S. C., & Park, J. (2024). Skills and training in hierarchical capitalism: The rise and fall of vocational training in South Korea. *Journal of Contemporary Asia, 54*(2), 260-281.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum.

Gauly, B., & Lechner, C. M. (2019). Self-perfection or self-selection? Unraveling the relationship between job-related training and adults' literacy skills. *PLoS ONE, 14*(5), e0215971.

Hanushek, E. A., Schwerdt, G., Wiederhold, S., & Woessmann, L. (2015). Returns to skills around the world: Evidence from PIAAC. *European Economic Review, 73*, 103-130.

Hanushek, E. A., Kinne, L., Witthöft, F., & Woessmann, L. (2025). Age and cognitive skills: Use it or lose it. *Science Advances, 11*(10), eads1560.

Hudson, K. (2007). The new labor market segmentation: Labor market dualism in the new economy. *Social Science Research, 36*(1), 286-312.

ISTAT (2025, October 15*). Structural business statistics: Enterprises and enterprise groups - Year 2023.* https://www.istat.it/en/press-release/structural-business-statistics-enterprises-and-enterprise-groups-year-2023/

Kalleberg, A. L. (2000). Nonstandard employment relations: Part-time, temporary, and contract work. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*(1), 341-365.

Kumaş, H., Çağlar, A., & Karaalp, H. S. (2014). Firm size and labor market segmentation theory: Evidence from Turkish microdata. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences, 150*, 360–373.

Lee, J., Park, Y., & Eom, S. (2025). Changes in the Competencies of Koreans: An International Comparison Over the Past Decade (National Policy Proposal, 26). Seoul National University Institute for Future Strategy (IFS).

Livingstone, D. W. (2001). Adults' Informal Learning: Definitions, Findings, Gaps and Future Research. *WALL Working Paper No. 21.*

Ministry of SMEs and Startups. (2025, August 29). *Status of small and medium enterprises*. https://www.mss.go.kr/site/smba/foffice/ex/statDB/StReportContentDetailView.do?gb=1&reSeq=2152

OECD (2009). *PIAAC Literacy: A Conceptual Framework*. OECD Education Working Papers No. 34. OECD Publishing, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/220348414075

OECD (2013). *OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en

OECD (2016). *Age, Ageing and Skills: Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Education Working Papers No. 132. https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jm0q1n38lvc-en

OECD (2020). *Enhancing Training Opportunities in SMEs in Korea*, Getting Skills Right, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/7aa1c1db-en.

OECD (2022). *Policies to increase youth employment in Korea*. OECD Economics Department Working Papers No. 1740. https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/fe10936d-en

OECD (2023). *OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Outlook 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/342b8564-en

OECD (2024). *Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World?: Survey of Adult Skills 2023*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b263dc5d-en

OECD and AIAS (2025). *Institutional Characteristics of Trade Unions, Wage Setting, State Intervention and Social Pacts*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/oecdaias-ictwss-database.html.

OECD (2026). *How Workers Use, or Don't Use, their Skills in the Workplace*, Getting Skills Right, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/0e7c6dc9-en

Oh, I. (2019). Korea vs. Italy: Why Culture is Important in Keeping your Country Competitive. *Culture and Empathy, 2*(2), 86-104.

Pietrobelli, C. (1998). The socio-economic foundations of competitiveness: An econometric analysis of Italian industrial districts. *Industry and Innovation, 5*(2), 139-155.

Piore, M. J., & Sabel, C. F. (1984). *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity*. Basic Books.

Reder, S. (2009). The Development of Literacy and Numeracy in Adult Life. In S. Reder & J. Bynner (Eds.), *Tracking Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills: Findings from Longitudinal Research* (pp. 59-84). Routledge.

Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Appendix – Mean Differences and Standard Errors in Literacy Scores by Employment Type and Age Group in Korea and Italy

Age Group	Employees of Large Enterprises – Employees of SMEs		Employees of Large Enterprises – Self-employed		Employees of Large Enterprises – Non-respondents		Employees of SMEs – Self-Employed		Employees of SMEs – Non-respondents		Self-employed – Non-respondents	
	Diff (SE)	**t**	**Diff (SE)**	**t**	**Diff (SE)**	**t**	**Diff (SE)**	**t**	**Diff (SE)**	**t**	**Diff (SE)**	**t**
24 and under	11.74 (13.60)	0.86	32.53 (24.57)	1.32	4.44 (13.84)	0.32	20.79 (22.63)	0.92	-7.29 (5.59)	-1.31	-28.09 (21.71)	-1.29
25–34	15.49 (4.24)	3.66 ***	17.98 (7.85)	2.29 *	19.80 (5.96)	3.32 ***	2.49 (7.21)	0.35	4.31 (4.90)	0.88	1.82 (8.43)	0.22
35–44	19.11 (4.75)	4.02 ***	17.95 (5.66)	3.17 **	25.59 (6.11)	4.19 ***	-1.16 (4.13)	-0.28	6.48 (4.60)	1.41	7.65 (5.27)	1.45
45–54	17.81 (4.84)	3.68 ***	16.71 (5.08)	3.29 **	23.01 (5.44)	4.23 ***	-1.11 (4.18)	-0.26	5.19 (4.34)	1.19	6.30 (4.36)	1.44
55 plus	6.45 (6.99)	0.92	4.60 (7.42)	0.62	11.82 (7.25)	1.63	-1.85 (3.89)	-0.47	5.37 (3.46)	1.55	7.22 (4.17)	1.73

Average Differences and Standard Errors in Literacy Scores by Employment Type and Age Cohort in Korea (*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001)

Age Group	Employees of Large Enterprises – Employees of SMEs		Employees of Large Enterprises – Self-employed		Employees of Large Enterprises – Non-respondents		Employees of SMEs – Self-Employed		Employees of SMEs – Non-respondents		Self-employed – Non-respondents	
	Diff (SE)	**t**	**Diff (SE)**	**t**	**Diff (SE)**	**t**	**Diff (SE)**	**t**	**Diff (SE)**	**t**	**Diff (SE)**	**t**
24 and under	9.58 (11.99)	0.80	4.15 (16.66)	0.25	1.95 (11.57)	0.17	-5.43 (13.07)	-0.42	-7.63 (5.15)	-1.48	-2.20 (12.83)	-0.17
25–34	16.60 (9.31)	1.78	6.65 (9.00)	0.74	42.77 (8.64)	4.95 ***	-9.95 (6.60)	-1.51	26.16 (5.30)	4.94 ***	36.11 (7.33)	4.93 ***
35–44	10.11 (8.95)	1.13	3.08 (11.02)	0.28	34.93 (9.19)	3.80 ***	-7.03 (9.02)	-0.78	24.83 (5.81)	4.27 ***	31.86 (8.16)	3.90 ***
45–54	8.50 (7.50)	1.13	5.64 (8.46)	0.67	40.25 (6.76)	5.96 ***	-2.86 (5.59)	-0.51	31.75 (4.50)	7.05 ***	34.61 (5.78)	5.98 ***
55 plus	6.30 (7.83)	0.81	0.23 (8.16)	0.03	23.86 (7.09)	3.37 ***	-6.07 (7.46)	-0.81	17.56 (5.00)	3.51 ***	23.63 (6.50)	3.64 ***

Average Differences and Standard Errors in Literacy Scores by Employment Type and Age Cohort in Italy (*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001)

Alexandra Ioannidou, Katrin Kaufmann-Kuchta

Navigating the Wicked Problem: Adult Learning and Education in German Immigrant Integration Policy

Keywords: Adult education policies, immigrant integration, wicked problems, policy analysis, historical institutionalism

Aims: This policy analysis examines the role of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) policies in tackling the 'wicked' problem of immigrant and refugee integration in Germany. The paper analyses the foundational role of ALE within Germany's post-2005 integration policy, with a particular focus on the government-funded integration courses. It examines the policy objectives, programme design and policy implementation, and investigates the nature and implications of recent political shifts, considering the German immigration context (Ellermann 2021) and the public discourse.

Conceptual framework: The analysis considers immigrant integration a 'wicked policy problem'. Such problems are complex, intractable and cannot be solved using traditional policy solutions due to their inherent characteristics (Head, 2022). Migrant integration is a 'wicked problem' due to its many interdependent and contradictory characteristics. It involves value conflicts and politically contested goals, making it extremely difficult to define, address or solve completely. Within this framework, we critically examine how German policy attempts to 'tame' this wickedness through ALE interventions taking a historical institutionalism perspective (Mahoney & Thelen 2012).

Methods/Data Sources: We use a qualitative, interpretive approach centred on document analysis. The analysis focuses on German policy documents, such as the Residence Act and the Integration Course Ordinance, as well as official policy documents, including official letters by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) to providers, containing administrative guidelines as well as instructions for conducting integration courses, and academic literature. Since the introduction of the Residence Act in 2005 marked a paradigm shift in German migration policy (Stüwe 2016), the analysis covers the period from 2005 to 2025 but focuses on changes between 2015 and 2025.

Conclusions: Germany's migration and integration policies have undergone significant changes in recent years. The 2005 Residence Act established integration courses as a key instrument of state-directed integration, combining language learning and socio-cultural orientation. This policy created a highly standardised national system (Wienberg et al., 2021). Over the last 20 years, the integration courses have undergone several adaptations, particularly regarding the target groups eligible for the courses. Although the need for labour migration due to demographic change is repeatedly emphasised, public debate in Germany often portrays immigration as a threat, influencing policy towards greater restriction. However, polarised public debates, top-down governance and short-term fixes can create significant limitations when addressing 'wicked policy problems'.

Significance to the Field: This research demonstrates the utility of the 'wicked problems' framework for analysing the inherent tensions and limitations of ALE policies as a tool for immigrant and refugee integration. It examines the evolution of Germany's large-scale integration course infrastructure and investigates patterns and actors of institutional change.

References

Ellermann, A. (2021). *The comparative politics of immigration: Policy choices in Germany, Canada, Switzerland, and the United States*. *Cambridge studies in comparative politics*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316551103

Head, Brian. (2022). Wicked Problems in Public Policy. Palgrave McMillan.

Mahoney, J. & Thelen, K. (2012). A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change. In: Mahoney, J. Thelen, K. (Eds.) *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-37.

Stüwe, K. (2016). Das Zuwanderungsgesetz von 2005 und die neue Migrationspolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. In. K. Stüwe & E. Hermannseder (Eds.). *Migration und Integration als transnationale Herausforderung,* DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-11645-3_2, pp. 25-48

SVR (Sachverständigenrat für Migration und Integration) (2024). *Jahresgutachten 2024*. Berlin. https://www.svr-migration.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Jahresgutachten-2024-Barrierefrei.pdf (last access 31.07.2025)

Wienberg, J., Dutz, G., Grotlüschen, A. (2021). Language Learning of Migrants: Empirical Evidence from the German Integration Course System with a Focus on Literacy Courses. In. Levine, G.S., Mallows, D. (eds): *Language Learning of Adult Migrants in Europe*, Educational Linguistics 53, Springer, Cham, pp. 95-118.

Salma Ismail (University of Cape Town)

Title: Policy provision alone has proved insufficient to ensure social justice for adult education and learners – some reflections from South Africa.

Abstract

In South Africa, since independence in 1994 there has been a plethora of policy interventions over the last 25 years to do with improving provision in the field of Adult Education and Learning. However, most of these policy interventions have not met their objectives and high levels of illiteracy and lack of employable skills for both adult and youth remain, and adult educators have decreased in the system, which was poorly resourced and dysfunctional.

To change this in 2013, the Department of Higher Education (DHET) in South Africa published a new policy for Adult Community Education and Training (ACET) which was framed as promoting education and social justice. The policy advocated for a holistic approach to ACET which responded to community needs such as skills development, youth unemployment and formal schooling for youth who have left school early, usually referred to as 'dropouts'. In addition, the policy made provision for non-formal education programmes which focus on income generating activities and citizenship education.

In line with this policy, Community Learning Centres were established, and new qualifications were introduced in 2015 to professionalise the field and to build the capacity of adult educators, referred to as lecturers in the new policy.

The central argument is that despite important policy shifts since 2013, there is a continuation of poor delivery both of social justice objectives and the state's provision of skills necessary for economic inclusion.

This is explored by drawing on my own experience as an activist academic, who was involved in participating in developing new policies for Adult Community and Education and Training (ACET) and designing new qualifications for ACET.

This paper draws on recent research which has sought to investigate, using qualitative methods (interviews, observation) whether the new policies have made any inroads into social justice in poor communities as framed in the policy discourse (Baatjes.I and Baatjes. B. 2019; Loizides 2024; Pottier 2024) as well as how the latest polices have impacted on adult educators and the learners in the newly established Community Learning Centres.

Some of the results indicate that adult educators face the same challenges as in previous years – poor funding to this education sector, precarious, low paid and often unpaid employment, a standardised curriculum which do not take community needs into account, and no funds for non-formal community education.

In conclusion, after nine years of public provision of ACET the experiences and perspectives of adult educators and learners suggest that many of the core policies have not translated into action, and this sector remains under-resourced. This paper explores the perspectives of adult educators and learners which need to be included to improve provision at a community level.

Key words; adult education policy, social justice, community learning centres, adult educators

References

Baatjes. I. & Baatjes. B 2019. The struggle of Adult Educators in South Africa in https://www.dvv-international.de/en/adult-education-and-development/editions/aed-862019-the-good-adult-educator/section-2-at-the-negotiating-table/the-struggle-of-adult-educators-in-south-africa-continues

Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2015). National Policy on Community Colleges. Government Gazette, 3 July 2015. No.569. Continuing Education and Training Act, 2006 (Act No. 16 of 2006). /https://www.dhet.gov.za/Community/national%20policy%20on%20community%20colleges.pdf

Ismail S. (2018) Articulating a space for critical learning with a social justice orientation in an adult education programme [Special issue]. *South African Journal of Education*, 38(4).

Jessica Lozides (2024) Questioning the narrative: stories from a Community Learning Centre in the Western Cape. Unpublished Masters thesis. University of Cape Town.

Pottier, L. (2024) Adult Education and Social Justice: an Unfolding Case Study of a South African Community Learning Centre, paper presented at CASAE conference

Bruno Joaquim and Rosanna Barros (Universidade do Algarve)

Life and Learning Trajectories of Adult Brazilian Immigrants in Portugal: the case of the Qualify Program

Amid the resurgence of racist and xenophobic narratives, threats to the continuity of policies aimed at adult education and the reception of immigrants have intensified in several countries. In Portugal — where the immigrant population accounts for approximately 15% of the total, or around 1.5 million people — there has been a progressive tightening of migration policies, driven by pressures from conservative and far-right movements. This new context has resulted in stricter immigration controls and increased pressures on the resident immigrant population. Among the largest groups are Brazilians, around 513,000 individuals, constituting the largest foreign community.

This study aims to understand the learning trajectories of Brazilian immigrants participating in training programmes under the Qualify Program, within the context of the recent wave of migration (2016–2024). The Programme is a Portuguese adult education policy aimed at reducing inequalities by augmenting educational qualifications, enhancing employability, and promoting lifelong learning. Linked to the Ministries of Education and Labour, it offers educational and training pathways through the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) model, which allows adults to obtain academic and professional qualifications without formal schooling.

The theoretical framework of this research is situated at the intersection of immigrant education, adult education, and decolonial epistemologies. Although still incipient, the decolonial approach in migration studies, inspired by Abdelmalek Sayad, highlights the connection between migration and colonialism, as clearly observed in the Luso-Brazilian demographic flow, and demonstrates how historical power relations are maintained. Immigrants are understood as subjected to multiple oppressions derived from coloniality, including racism, xenophobia, and the cisheteropatriarchy. Both the immigrant and the adult learner are considered subalterns by the structures of the coloniality of being, power, and knowledge, and consequently dehumanised by the intensification of intersecting oppressions.

Methodologically, this is a qualitative, biographical study, which selected and conducted in-depth interviews with ten participants from learning contexts encompassed by the Qualify Program. The analysis focuses on their biographical narratives, particularly the interface between migration trajectories and learning trajectories.

The results indicate that the participants' life histories are marked by interrupted or incomplete schooling, resulting from social, occupational, and living conditions in their countries of origin, as well as from disinvestment in adult education policies. Furthermore, two key findings stand out: the prominent presence of intersecting oppressions, rooted in coloniality, which permeate the participants' life and learning trajectories, with particular emphasis on experiences of xenophobia, racism, and cisheteropatriarchy; and the significant role of the Qualify Program and the recognition of prior learning in their professional qualification, which participants also acknowledge as a crucial step in their processes of emancipation and in affirming their dignity and citizenship as immigrants.

Keywords: adult education; immigrant education; Brazilians in Portugal.

Panagiotis Kalogerakis and Christos Goulas (Labour Institute of the Greek General Confederation of Labour)

The emergence of micro-credentials – hopes, hype and … credential inflation: A critical analysis

This paper focuses on the emergence of micro-credentials and seeks to unveil mismatches between policy rhetoric and the enactment of this policy tool –far away from key actors' deep-core beliefs (see Milana & Mikulec, 2023)– with implications on social and educational inequalities. We aim to explore the potential and to contest the hype surrounding micro-credentials, and also to interrogate the power dynamics between learners, employers and governments.

The human capital is often perceived as the main vehicle for productivity and growth following the 'promise of a surfeit of highly paid, highly skilled jobs' for the 'enlightened' developed democracies that would invest in educating their citizens (O'Donovan, 2022: 100). In parallel, Lifelong Learning participation is rather low and downward mobility has become a by-product of the educated underclass (Roth, 2019). Micro-credentials are promoted as a tool that certifies clearly defined, quality assured, short-term learning outcomes – as a vehicle for the policy mantra of skills revolution (Cedefop, 2022). They offer opportunities for stackability and flexibility and could prove valuable for VET and LLL in cutting-edge industries (OECD, 2023). However, the shift away from full qualifications and a holistic approach to education and training, generates concerns about the emerging possibility of precarious work, credential inflation and the reinforcement of inequalities – 'gig qualifications for a gig economy' (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2021: 1279). At the same time, employers do not fully trust micro-credentials, however in practice they do profit from responsibilised learners who are urged to run after their own employability narratives (Reynoldson, 2022).

The foundation of our contribution is Critical Policy Analysis (CPA). Using CPA as our analytical lens we conduct a document-based analysis of policy texts from Supranational and International Organizations, tracing the policy trajectory from the "European Skills Agenda" (2020) to the "Union of Skills" (2025), and synthesise insights from the critical literature on micro-credentials. As an analytical tool, CPA illuminates the roots of policies and the complex links between education policies and the relations of dominance and subordination in society – beyond the value-free conception of policy (Apple, 2019; Fernández et al., 2018).

Micro-credentials represent a potential disruption to the established order of both formal and non-formal education. Within contemporary labour markets —where the paradox of credential abundance coexists with persistent skills shortages— new, flexible and unregulated forms of targeted certification proliferate, thereby increasing the risk of them becoming fragmented, low-trust add-ons rather than credible pathways that complement full qualifications and widen opportunity.

Keywords: micro-credentials, skills, visibility, employability, credential inflation

References

Apple, M. W. (2019). On doing critical policy analysis. *Educational Policy*, 33(1), 276–287. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904818807307

Cedefop. (2022). *Championing the skills revolution* (Briefing note No. 9164). https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/886

Fernández, E., LeChasseur, K., & Donaldson, M. L. (2018). Responses to including parents in teacher evaluation policy: A critical policy analysis. *Journal of Education Policy*, 33(3), 398-413, https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1370135

Milana, M., & Mikulec, B. (2023). Setting the new European agenda for adult learning 2021–2030: Political mobilisation and the influence of advocacy coalitions. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 14(2), 205–228. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.4637

O'Donovan, N. (2022). *Pursuing the Knowledge Economy: A Sympathetic History of High-Skill, High-Wage Hubris*. Agenda Publishing.

OECD (2023). *Micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability: Uses and possibilities.* OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 66, OECD Publishing, https://doi.org/10.1787/9c4b7b68-en.

Reynoldson, M. (2022). Marketing micro-credentials: An analysis of actors, voices and messages in educational innovation discourse. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2022.2083657

Wheelahan, L., & Moodie. G. (2021). Gig qualifications for the gig economy: Micro-credentials and the "hungry mile". *Higher Education*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00742-3.

André Kukuk (Bergische Universität Wuppertal)

Far from what is needed? Political reform strategies versus participants' demands on (higher) continuing education formats

ABSTRACT

Global developments in recent years have led to lasting and disruptive changes at various levels, which also challenge the (tertiary) education system to make education not only more accessible, but also more adaptable to the changing requirements of a transforming society. Even though digitalization—reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic—has been able to expand access and increase the accuracy of teaching formats and curricula with its new technological possibilities, the comprehensive adaptation of relevant framework conditions has not yet been achieved, particularly on policy level.

With the increasing importance of lifelong learning this becomes particularly relevant in the field of (academic) continuing education, which has already responded to the need for personalized and adaptable educational pathways with the introduction of micro-credentials as modular learning experiences (Pirkkalainen 2022), but which continues to face challenges in implementation due to federal differences in the legal framework regarding issues of financing (full cost coverage), different organizational forms, or the interpretation of the European Union competition law (Maschwitz/Sweers 2025).

Using the example of the latest draft bill for the revision of the University Strengthening Act of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), the article is focused on current political reform efforts by the Ministry of Culture and Science (MKW NRW 2024), in order to subsequently compare them with the specific needs of participants in various academic continuing education formats. Based on the results of a formative evaluation of two academic certificate- and workshop-programs, the analysis of group interviews with educational professionals is used to illustrate changing demands on (higher) continuing education formats, which are primarily expressed in a need for flexible programs with compact learning units whose content is directly linked to their everyday professional work experience and whose formal arrangement cumulatively enables a company-independent certification in the sense of micro-credentials.

This article offers initial conclusions and ideas whether the changes to organizational frameworks sought at the political level will enable the various actors involved in academic continuing education to design customized and market-oriented formats for the future in order to meet both current and upcoming needs of potential participants. It can be shown that the proposed changes in North Rhine-Westphalia have the ability to expand the scope of action especially for providers of higher continuing education (including administrative personnel and ALE practitioners) to enhance the development of market-oriented formats, but only on condition that the wording contained in the actual draft bill will be retained during the parliamentary process and incorporated into the final draft bill.

KEYWORDS

Academic continuing education; University Strengthening Act (NRW); program development; evaluation research

LITERATURE

Höhn, Nicole/Piwonka, Matina/Preiss, Carola/Klippel, Susanne (2021): Erfolgsfaktoren in der wissenschaftlichen Weiterbildung. Ergebnisse einer Erhebung an bayerischen Hochschulen. In: *Zeitschrift Hochschule und Weiterbildung*. Heft 2, S. 60-67.

Liebig, Brigitte/Nentwig-Gesemann, Iris (2009): Gruppendiskussion. In: Kuhl, S. et al. (Hrsg.): Handbuch Methoden der Organisationsforschung. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, S. 102-123.

Maschwitz, Annika/Sweers, Franziska (2025): Einleitung. In: Maschwitz, Annika/Stöterau, Kim Sophie/Bergstermann, Anna/Granström, Monica Bravo/Ihwe, Jan/Kröner, Andreas/ Sweers, Franziska (Hrsg.): Entwicklungsfelder der wissenschaftlichen Weiterbildung in Deutschland. Münster/New York: Waxmann, S. 7-12.

Ministerium für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (MKW NRW) (2024): Gesetzentwurf der Landesregierung. Gesetz betreffend die Stärkung der Hochschullandschaft (Hochschulstärkungsgesetz): https://www.mkw.nrw/system/files/media/document/file/refe_hochschulstaerkungsgesetz.pdf [30.09.2025].

Pirkkalainen, Henri/Sood, Ira/Padron Napoles, Carmen/Kukkonen, Arttu/Camilleri, Anthony (2022): How might micro-credentials influence institutions and empower learners in higher education? In: *Educational Research*, 65(1), pps. 40-63.

Claudia Kulmus

Ageing in urban areas: age-friendly city policies and local adult education

Global ageing is one of the major issues that will become increasingly relevant over the next 20 to 30 years (Brink, 2023). We are facing a historically unique situation of longevity alongside low birth rates. Consequently, global demographics will result in a large elderly population that needs to be integrated into society. The World Health Organization (WHO) has established a network of age-friendly cities to address this issue, which is related to the United Nations' sustainable development goal (Kulmus, 2025). While inclusion tackles various dimensions, from an adult education perspective, the role and accessibility of education in later life must be at the core of attention. This is particularly critical given that older people tend to drop out of adult education institutions (Kulmus et al., 2025). Research addresses this issue by drawing on spatial approaches asking for spaces and places of participation in local environments. On the other hand, it remains unclear to what extent local age-friendly city policies address lifelong learning. As Hamburg joined the network in 2024, this paper analyses the city's local age-friendly strategy (Hamburger Bürgerschaft, 2024) and compares it with data from a project on the everyday participation spaces of older people, based on narrative landscapes and combining a socio-spatial approach with subjective-oriented learning theories (Kulmus, 2025; Skowranek et al., 2025). The findings show firstly how small a role is assigned to lifelong learning in these global and at the same time local policies. Secondly, this raises questions about how primary adult education institutions can engage more with lifelong learning by exploring new sites and formats for learning provision.

References

Brink, S. (2023). The Longevity Dividend. Springer

Boccagni, P., & Bonfanti, S. (Eds.). (2023). *Migration and domestic space. Ethnographies of home in the making*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4

BÜRGERSCHAFT DER FREIEN UND HANSESTADT HAMBURG (2024). Aktionsplan „Age-friendly City – für ein altersfreundliches Hamburg“. Mitteilung des Senats an die Bürgerschaft. Drucksache 22/15703, 02. 07. 24

Kulmus, C. (2024). Altern und Nachhaltigkeit – Versuch einer Verhältnisbestimmung. In M. Ebner von Eschenbach, B. Käpplinger, M. Kondratjuk, K. Kraus, M. Rohs, B. Schmidt-Hertha, K. J. Rott, & V. Thalhammer (Hrsg.), Erwachsenenbildung und Nachhaltigkeit. Sondierungen und Forschung zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit (S. 63–76). Band zur Sektionstagung Erwachsenenbildung der DGfE 2023 in München. Barbara Budrich

Kulmus, C., Skowranek, K., & Schultz-Edwards, J. (2025). Older migrant women’s places of literacy practices – perspectives of an almost invisible population group. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 44(5), 556–570. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2025.2460730

Skowranek, K., Schultz-Edwards, J., & Kulmus, C. (2025). Alltägliche Lebensorte und Lernen im Alter. In M. Ebner von Eschenbach, M. Kondratjuk, M. Rohs, K. Kraus, H. Bremer, S. Cora, L. Eble, C. Opheys, S. Schreiber-Barsch, F. Wagner, & T. Zosel (Hrsg.), Teilhabe durch Teilnahme? Erwachsenenbildung und Weiterbildung zwischen Partizipation und Exklusion. Band zur Sektionstagung Erwachsenenbildung der DGfE 2024 in Essen. Barbara Budrich

World Health Organization (2025). Age-friendly cities and communities.
https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/age-friendly-cities-framework/

Community Education in the Shadow of the Far-Right: Neoliberal Constraints, Misdirected Grievance, and Resources of Hope

Suzanne Kyle

Maynooth University

Supervisor: Dr. Camilla Fitzsimons

Email: suzanne.a.kyle.2022@mumail.ie

Abstract

In recent years in Ireland far-right activity has become increasingly visible, not only in protests, online disinformation campaigns and arson attacks, but also within community centres, adult education classrooms, and other civic spaces traditionally associated with dialogue, inclusion, and democratic learning. Drawing on original doctoral research, this paper explores how community-based adult educators are navigating the challenges posed by this phenomenon. It considers how neoliberal policies have reshaped adult and community education in ways that diminish its democratic and critical potential and have helped to nurture the social conditions in which far-right ideologies can take root. The paper goes on to highlight the transformative potential of community education as a site of collective participation, inclusion and a democratic alternative to the politics of hate.

Historically, community education in Ireland has been grounded in Freirean traditions of critical pedagogy and popular education emphasising collective empowerment, dialogue, and consciousness-raising as foundations for social transformation. Emerging from feminist, working-class, and anti-poverty movements, it was celebrated in state policy as a distinctive and democratic model of adult learning (Department of Education and Science, 2000). Over the past two decades, however, this emancipatory potential has been progressively constrained through neoliberal restructuring which has repositioned adult and community education as an instrument of labour-market activation. Parallel to this, severe funding cuts to the community and voluntary sector,

and an expansion of precarious, outcomes-driven employment, have undermined the autonomy and critical potential of the field.

These developments have intensified the conditions in which far-right narratives can thrive. As inequality deepens and trust in democracy declines, the far-right positions itself as a populist alternative while diverting anger away from the structural failures of capitalism. The paper argues that such movements arise from within neoliberal capitalism itself, serving to protect existing power and wealth (Parenti, 2020) through nationalism, scapegoating, and the deliberate manufacturing and redirection of social grievance towards powerless and often marginalised groups, rather than those in power. This has occurred within the context of a broader weakening of left-wing politics which has shifted its emphasis away from struggles for economic justice towards a form of "progressive neoliberalism" (Fraser, 2019) marked by an increasing preoccupation with identity politics at the expense of material redistribution.

The research draws on a mixed-methods design, combining focus groups with community education leaders and a national survey of community educators across Ireland to explore how they encounter and respond to far-right narratives, intimidation, and disinformation within their practice, while simultaneously aiming to sustain traditions of solidarity, creativity, and hope.

The findings illuminate the potential for community education to continue to serve as a vital site for the nurturing of a vibrant social and educated democracy (West, 2016) in spite of structural constraints and intimidation by far-right actors. In this way, community education can be understood not merely as a methodology or a set of tools, but as an ethical and relational practice grounded in empathy, dialogue, and collective responsibility. Through this, it creates space for knowledge to be produced in solidarity rather than division, challenging the scapegoating patterns of the far-right and reasserting more inclusive forms of community.

Introduction

In recent years, Ireland has witnessed a marked rise in far-right activity, visible not only in high-profile protests and online disinformation campaigns, but also within civic spaces, including community centres, adult education classrooms, and organisations

traditionally associated with dialogue, inclusion, and democratic participation. In this paper, the term far-right is used to describe a range of political ideas and practices characterised by exclusionary nationalism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and the scapegoating of marginalised groups for social problems, often accompanied by hostility toward democratic and egalitarian values.

This shift presents a significant challenge to community education, a distinct strand of adult education in Ireland that gained prominence in the 1970s and 1980s through grassroots responses to social need (Connolly, 2010). Grounded in traditions of critical pedagogy associated with Paulo Freire, and shaped by feminist, literacy, and anti-poverty movements (Fitzsimons, 2017), community education was recognised at state policy level for its emphasis on collective empowerment, dialogue, and consciousness-raising (Department of Education and Science, 2000).

This growth of far-right activity cannot be understood in isolation. Rather, it has developed within the broader context of neoliberalism's dominance as an economic and political ideology, which has both undermined the critical and democratic capacities of adult education (Finnegan, 2016) and intensified the social and economic insecurities on which far-right narratives draw (Brown, 2019). At a broader transnational level, this period is often described as the emergence of a "fourth wave" of post-war far-right politics, marked by the normalisation and mainstreaming of exclusionary nationalist discourse across many liberal democracies (Mudde, 2019). Drawing on original doctoral research with community educators across Ireland, this paper examines how practitioners are experiencing and responding to these changes. It argues that, despite increasing pressures, community education continues to hold significant potential as a resource of hope, fostering solidarity, critical dialogue, and more inclusive forms of democratic engagement.

Theoretical and Contextual Framing

Contemporary far-right mobilisation in Ireland is often understood through its most visible expressions, including street protests, riots, and online extremism. Events such as the Dublin riots of November 2023 are frequently framed in the media as eruptions of working-class anger or responses to "legitimate grievances". While such interpretations capture important aspects of recent developments, they risk obscuring the deeper

structural conditions that enable far-right narratives to emerge and gain traction. Drawing on the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, this paper adopts a commitment to “reading the world” (Freire, 1996, p. 122) which links personal experience to wider structures of power, inequality, and history.

The rise of the far-right is therefore best understood not as an aberration, but as embedded within the dynamics of neoliberalism, a phase of capitalism that extends market principles into all areas of life, whatever the social cost (Finnegan, 2016). It does so through the privatisation and marketisation of public goods, reduced wealth redistribution through taxation, and the weakening of welfare provision (Brown, 2015; D. Harvey, 2005). Contrary to its portrayal as an economic model that limits state intervention, neoliberalism reconfigures state power to protect capital and finance, often at the expense of social welfare and democratic accountability (Brown, 2015). The Irish state’s response to the 2008 financial crisis illustrates this dynamic. While austerity was presented as a fiscal necessity, its effects were unevenly distributed. Substantial public resources were used to stabilise the banking system, while deep cuts were imposed across public services and the community and voluntary sector (Harvey, 2012). Community education was particularly affected, experiencing funding reductions, increased precarity, and a shift toward short-term, target-driven provision. In practice, this meant less time for outreach, trust-building, and community development work, at a time when poverty, housing insecurity, and inequality were intensifying.

These changes are not only economic but social and political. Neoliberalism promotes individualism and competition and recasts people as solely responsible for their own circumstances (Brown, 2015). Within this ideology social problems are reframed as matters of personal responsibility rather than structural or political issues (Giroux, 2014). This individualistic outlook in turn contributes to declining trust, social fragmentation, and weakened collective bonds (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). In this context, divisive political narratives can more easily take hold (Wodak, 2015).

A related tension emerges in how these conditions are experienced and interpreted. As structural and political explanations for inequality become less visible, people are more likely to understand their situation in comparative terms, particularly in relation to other social groups. While often presented as a revolt of the economically marginalised,

research suggests that support for far-right politics is linked to perceived threats to status and social position. In unequal societies, even relatively advantaged groups may experience anxiety about losing status (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010), particularly as marginalised groups gain visibility or rights. This is reinforced by individualised ways of thinking that obscure structural causes and encourage people to interpret inequality through comparisons with other groups, intensifying perceptions of status threat, rather than directing attention to underlying social and economic conditions.

A further dimension of this dynamic is captured by Nancy Fraser's concept of "progressive neoliberalism" (Fraser, 2019) in which commitments to diversity and inclusion coexist with economic policies that do little to redistribute wealth. While this has delivered important gains in recognition for some marginalised groups, it has done so alongside the persistence of material inequality. In this context, economic grievances are not resolved but redirected, as frustration generated by widening inequality is increasingly channelled towards those perceived to have benefited from shifts in cultural recognition. As a result, economic grievances are increasingly expressed through questions of identity, with groups who are visible within "progressive" politics sometimes positioned as responsible for wider social and economic pressures.

These narratives are shaped and circulated through political actors, media, and online networks, allowing them to travel across different contexts while appearing rooted in local concerns. In this sense, the rise of the far-right cannot be understood solely as a grassroots response, but also as a top-down process in which public anxieties are organised and channelled towards scapegoated groups (Mondon, 2022). Issues such as housing shortages, healthcare access, and unemployment, while real and pressing, are often reframed through simplified and exclusionary solutions, such as anti-immigration policies, that leave underlying structural problems unaddressed (Pelinka, 2013; Revelli, 2019). In this way, political attention is redirected away from economic inequalities and towards marginalised groups, a dynamic that can serve to protect existing distributions of power and wealth (Parenti, 2020).

These dynamics suggest that the rise of the far-right is not a fringe phenomenon, but one embedded in the conditions of neoliberal capitalism. Inequality, individualisation, and political fragmentation interact to create an environment in which far-right narratives can

emerge and resonate. Understanding these conditions is essential for analysing how such dynamics are encountered and contested within community education. In this sense, the theoretical framing reaffirms the importance of "reading the world" as a way of linking everyday experience to broader social and economic structures.

Methodology

The research on which this paper is based adopted a mixed methods design, using different methods in sequence to develop a fuller and more nuanced understanding of a complex social phenomenon, an approach commonly associated with mixed methods research (Greene, 2007). The study specifically aimed to examine how community educators in Ireland encounter far-right narratives within their practice, and how they make sense of and respond to these dynamics.

Phase One involved three online focus groups with purposively selected community education practitioners in leadership roles, including Community Education Facilitators within Education & Training Boards (ETBs) (Ireland's state-funded adult education providers) and managers in Community & Voluntary sector organisations. These discussions, guided by open-ended questions, created space for collective reflection on emerging challenges and informed the development of Phase Two.

This second phase consisted of the development of a survey which was circulated widely through professional and practitioner networks to a broad cohort of community education stakeholders, including ETB staff, Community & Voluntary sector workers and tutors, with 104 participants completing the survey. Combining closed and open-ended questions, the survey captured both patterns of experience and more in-depth reflections on practice, values, and the purpose of community education.

Data were collected with ethical considerations central throughout, including informed consent, confidentiality, and careful dissemination to mitigate risks associated with the topic. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, while quantitative findings provided contextual insight, enabling the generation of integrated conclusions (Creswell, 2021). Overall, this approach supported a nuanced exploration of how community educators in Ireland encounter and respond to far-right narratives within broader structural conditions.

Findings

This section presents the key findings from the research. Four interrelated themes are presented: (1) Far-Right Presence in Community Spaces; (2) Conditions Shaping Practice; (3) Pedagogical Responses and Tensions; and (4) Community Education as a Resource of Hope. Together, these themes highlight that far-right activity is not an external phenomenon impacting community education from a distance, but one that is embedded within everyday educational, institutional, and relational contexts.

Far-Right Presence in Community Spaces

The data indicate that far-right discourse is increasingly present within community education environments. Rather than appearing solely through organised mobilisation or explicit extremism, it is often experienced through everyday narratives, subtle shifts in attitudes, and the circulation of misinformation within communities. As one survey participant noted,

> *Participants and staff of the organisation (who live in the city) have heard and spread misinformation originating from far-right sources. They have joined marches without truly understanding the politics of the individuals they are walking with.*

This highlights how far-right influence can operate through partial understandings and informal circulation rather than direct ideological commitment.

Participants described how far-right rhetoric contributes to heightened tension and suspicion within diverse learning spaces. One survey respondent observed that where adult learners had previously engaged openly with peers from different countries, they have now become “more suspicious of them and less likely to want to interact in class”. This demonstrates the way divisive narratives are entering the classroom environment from outside, reshaping interpersonal dynamics and disrupting the collective nature of community education.

This development was also reflected in accounts of migrant communities becoming more socially withdrawn. One participant noted that “more and more people in the migrant community are sticking to themselves and not integrating…for fear of something happening”. Rather than indicating disengagement, this behaviour was widely

interpreted as a protective response to perceived hostility. Fear, therefore, was shaping the nature of participation and belonging.

Within this context educators highlighted the vulnerability of migrant communities and other marginalised groups who are frequently positioned as targets within broader political discourse. As one survey respondent stated, migrants in their communities are increasingly "feeling blamed for the social issues in this country, like housing". This shows how structural issues such as housing shortages are reframed through exclusionary narratives that place responsibility on minority groups rather than on policy decisions.

Far-right discourse was also described as shaping classroom interactions in more subtle ways. Educators reported having to respond to discriminatory remarks and "wild claims" that required immediate facilitation. As one survey participant noted:

> *It is difficult to refute wild claims (i.e. through fact-checking) because the far-right encourages people to believe that all information from official sources is wrong. Conspiracy theories thrive on making people feel that they have the inside story, while their tutor in the education centre is naive!*

Another survey participant spoke about how the issues was experienced within the staff community also:

> *I have a colleague (only one, out of many) who believes in far-right conspiracy theories...and discusses these in classes under the guise of "we're all adults, everyone has their own opinion". This makes my job a lot more difficult!*

Alongside these everyday expressions, some accounts pointed to more visible forms of mobilisation that were nevertheless experienced in complex and contradictory ways. One focus group participant described protests against the proposed use of a local venue for international protection applicants, which outwardly appeared as positive, community-led gatherings:

> *...there were protests outside the proposed site...it became kind of like a little community celebration, festivities, where you know there'd be bonfires lit, and tea and sandwiches. You know people were really all united, this was what being*

shown to the outside world. But actually it wasn't all the community that were anti having people come and live in this DP [Direct Provision] centre.

This account highlights a disjuncture between how such events are presented publicly and how they are experienced locally. While these gatherings may be framed as cohesive expressions of community sentiment, they can obscure internal disagreement and the marginalisation of alternative voices. It also points to the ways in which far-right-aligned activity can become normalised through familiar and socially acceptable forms of community participation, making it more difficult to identify and challenge.

Conditions Shaping Practice

A second major theme concerns the structural and social conditions shaping how educators can respond to far-right narratives. Participants consistently identified constraints linked to funding models, organisational pressures, and increasing bureaucratisation within community education. These factors were widely seen as limiting the sector's capacity for relational, responsive, and critical practice.

A dominant concern was the growing emphasis on accreditation, measurable outputs, and labour market–driven adult education policies. Participants described a shift away from developmental and community-based work towards more instrumental forms of provision. As one focus group participant reflected, practitioners have been "funnelled into a way of working that promotes a neoliberal view of society where individuals are only valued according to their economic worth". This perception was echoed across responses highlighting the erosion of non-accredited, dialogic learning spaces. There were also repeated references to reduced support for outreach, pre-development work, and sustained engagement with marginalised communities, areas that have historically been central to community education's ability to reach those least well served by formal provision.

These pressures were not only organisational but reflect wider shifts associated with neoliberal restructuring. Respondents described a growing misalignment between the values of community education and the demands of funders, particularly where long-term, trust-based work is undervalued because its outcomes are less immediately visible or measurable. As one survey respondent noted, "we are sometimes hampered by our own need for numbers". Another pointed to a broader shift in how practice itself is

understood, observing that “outreach is now considered [provision] outside our venues, not as a set of principles and work methodology”.

A related but distinct concern centred on the limits placed on educators’ capacity to engage with contentious social issues. Participants described feeling “silenced” or uncertain about how far they could go in addressing politically sensitive topics, particularly in contexts where expectations of neutrality were implicit or explicitly required. As one respondent observed,

> *ETBs I have worked with seem reluctant to ‘take sides’ in social issues, perhaps as a misguided attempt to remain ‘neutral’.*

In practice, this framing of neutrality can constrain educators’ ability to respond meaningfully to misinformation, exclusionary narratives, or social injustice.

This sense of constraint was further compounded by professional isolation. As one survey respondent noted,

> *I expect many practitioners feel they are sole workers in this regard and perhaps don’t feel part of a community of practice.*

This highlights a wider perception that educators are increasingly working in fragmented and disconnected ways, pointing to the importance of strengthening spaces for shared reflection and support within the sector.

In addition to these internal pressures, participants described increasing exposure to external scrutiny and hostility, particularly in areas where far-right actors are active. Educators spoke about having to be “careful” about the kinds of programmes or events they organise due to the risk of backlash, both online and within their communities. In some cases, this included direct targeting. As one survey participant reported, “they have targeted colleagues and myself and groups we are involved with…posted pictures online and made memes and fun of my colleagues”. Others noted persistent negative far-right online engagement:

> *Our social media feeds in particular face lots of negative commentary.*

Participants also highlighted the impact on learners, with one respondent observing that

some of the migrant community that we work with have been subjected to abuse which has been encouraged on local social media site.

Taken together, these findings suggest that community educators are operating within a constrained environment shaped by funding priorities, organisational expectations, and external pressures. These constraints limit their ability to respond proactively to far-right discourse and reflect broader systemic priorities that shape what kinds of educational practice are possible.

Pedagogical Responses and Tensions

Despite these constraints, the data highlights a range of pedagogical strategies employed by community educators to engage with far-right narratives. Central among these is a strong emphasis on dialogue, values-based practice, and facilitation of critical reflection, reflecting the wider dialogical and participatory traditions of adult education practice (Finnegan, 2016).

A key finding is that purely fact-based responses to misinformation are often insufficient. While some participants initially emphasised the need for “accurate facts and figures” to challenge false narratives, many also recognised the limits of this approach, particularly where views are shaped by strong emotions. In response, training and practice-based learning have increasingly focused on values-led approaches, emphasising dignity, equality, and shared human experience rather than factual correction alone. This aligns with research suggesting that political beliefs are not formed through rational evaluation alone, but are often shaped by intuitive and emotional responses, with reasoning functioning as a form of post hoc justification (Haidt, 2012). Similarly, emotionally charged narratives can lead to beliefs that are difficult to challenge through facts or reason (Stanley, 2015).

As one focus group participant summarised, practitioners are encouraged to move away from “right and wrong dialogue” and instead reframe discussions around “what we actually truly believe about people and their value and worth”. This approach reflects a broader pedagogical orientation that prioritises values over persuasion, and relational engagement over debate. One survey respondent summed this approach up as follows:

> *As an organisation, we understand we have 'little' control over outside narratives, and we strive to 'practice what we want to model' and operate from that ethos. Instead of challenging one narrative, we operate another.*

However, this approach is not without tension. Educators reported challenges in navigating situations where discriminatory or harmful views are expressed within learning spaces. While many emphasised the importance of maintaining respectful dialogue, others highlighted the difficulty of preventing conversations from reinforcing rather than challenging prejudice. One focus group participant described how a well-intentioned intervention on racism ultimately “went the wrong way” and resulted in learners becoming “more entrenched in a particular viewpoint” in spite of her significant experience in anti-racism work.

A further tension emerges between inclusion and harm. While community education is grounded in principles of openness and participation, educators also face the challenge of determining when and how to intervene in ways that protect vulnerable learners without shutting down dialogue. This balancing act requires significant skill and confidence, which not all practitioners feel adequately supported to develop. This point was captured by one survey participant who claimed that “people are generally not equipped to respond, and it is often awkward”. Another added that “far more emphasis is needed on the capacity building of Community Ed practitioners”.

Despite these challenges, the findings indicate a strong commitment among educators to dialogic and values-based practice as a central pedagogical response to far-right narratives. Rather than avoiding difficult conversations, many see facilitation itself as an important space for challenge and change.

Community Education as a Resource of Hope

Along with accounts of fear and constraint, the data also points to important sources of solidarity, connection, and possibility within community education practice. Participants consistently emphasised its role in fostering empathy, belonging, and relationships across diverse groups. As one survey participant noted,

> *Community adult education centres can be places where people from diverse backgrounds get to know each other and form relationships that I think enables people to learn to live together.*

Such accounts imply an image of community education as a resource of hope (Williams, 1989) highlighting how existing practices can contain the seeds of alternative futures, even in constrained conditions. In this context, community education emerges not only as a site of challenge, but also as one where more inclusive and relational ways of living can be practised and experienced.

A key mechanism identified by participants was the role of collective learning environments in challenging prejudice. Central to this is the recognition of the vast and diverse knowledge among all adults in the room, and the importance of facilitation of dialogue, rather than assuming the tutor must have all the knowledge and answers. This was captured by one survey participant who shared the following:

> *I've heard what I would regard as bigoted and discriminatory opinions expressed by a handful of individuals but in most cases these are countered or challenged by other learners.*

Educators also described moments where learners reconsidered previously held assumptions after engaging with people from different backgrounds. In some cases, people who had expressed negative views towards migrants or asylum seekers shifted their perspectives through these encounters. Empathy was central to this process. Participants highlighted how shared experiences of exclusion or stigma could create points of connection between groups, enabling people to recognise common ground across difference. This was particularly evident in contexts where learners themselves had experienced marginalisation, allowing for what one focus group participant described as “like-with-like” empathy-building.

There were also accounts of how deliberately structured, relational learning environments can create the conditions for empathy and connection across difference. Through group work, dialogue, and shared activities, learners are given opportunities to engage with one another’s experiences in ways that can unsettle assumptions and, at times, shift perspectives. One survey participant described this approach as follows:

> *Our centre would have a huge amount of students from ethnic minority groups …We start classes with group work, paired discussions, check ins and when people get to know each other they build good relationships. When we have*

intercultural days the students always love them and really empathise with the stories of how people got to this country.

Collaboration across organisations and communities was also identified as an important resource. Participants described initiatives that brought together diverse groups to work on shared projects, helping to build trust and reduce fear. These approaches were seen as most effective when they involved sustained engagement rather than one-off activities.

Importantly, solidarity was not understood as the absence of conflict or difference. Rather, it depended on dialogue taking place in good faith, within conditions of respect and safety. Within these boundaries, disagreement could be worked through without reinforcing division. This reflects a broader understanding of community education as a democratic practice grounded in dialogue, participation, and mutual recognition.

Discussion

Far-Right Narratives in Context

One of the clearest threads running through the data is that practitioners do not experience far-right narratives as detached ideological intrusions. Instead, they describe them as emerging in spaces already marked by strain, including housing shortages, service deficits, poverty, and wider resource pressures. One survey participant captured this directly:

I think it is much more helpful and accurate to view it as an expression of the growing inequality in our society; tackling growing wealth inequality and creating a more equal society is the best way to combat this problem.

These dynamics are closely tied to neoliberal restructuring. Within community education, this is experienced through reduced funding, increased targets, short-term contracts, and a shift away from dialogic and democratic education towards labour market–driven provision. Practitioners describe a constrained form of agency, where they are expected to respond to complex social and political issues without the time or institutional support required for meaningful engagement. In this context, far-right narratives cannot be separated from the weakening of the infrastructures that sustain democratic and relational practice.

Participants also acknowledged that these narratives are not only locally produced. They circulate through powerful political actors, media, and online international networks, but often become most visible in working-class communities and during moments of public disorder. One respondent noted:

> *I had no idea there were groups behind the rise in racism in Ireland until 5 or 6 months ago.*

This highlights growing awareness that far-right activity is shaped not only by local conditions but also by transnational networks and external actors (Cannon, King, Munnelly, & el-Moslemany, 2022) whose influence is often obscured in public discourse.

However, these wider dynamics do not position the far-right as external to Irish or Western societies. Rather, these narratives are taken up and reshaped within existing conditions of inequality. This aligns with scholarship suggesting that far-right mobilisation develops within dominant political and economic systems rather than outside them (Fraser, 2019; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Parenti, 2020). Instead of representing an aberration, it emerges out of the exploitation of existing or manufactured tensions around belonging, entitlement, and perceived loss.

Within this context, grievances related to housing, services, and neglect are frequently redirected. Rather than being articulated through policy critique, they are reframed through cultural or racialised explanations. What appears as anti-migrant sentiment is often rooted in experiences of inequality and abandonment, but is channelled in ways that displace attention from structural causes.

These processes unfold in a broader context of declining trust in established institutions (Revelli, 2019). Different actors compete to shape how social problems are understood, who belongs, and who is blamed. Grievances grounded in lived experience are also shaped, amplified, and sometimes reframed through political and media narratives produced by actors who remain distant from democratic accountability.

Educational Practice Under Pressure

Within this environment, practitioners face competing demands. They are expected to sustain inclusive, dialogical spaces while also managing risk, conflict, and safeguarding concerns in politically charged settings. Many described the difficulty of balancing open

discussion with the need to respond when harm, intimidation, or exclusionary discourse arises.

Rather than offering simple solutions, the findings point to an ongoing tension between sustaining dialogical practice and responding to pressures in practice. Freire's concept of dialogue is therefore not only a pedagogical technique but a way of engaging with the world. For Freire, dialogue allows diverse perspectives to support a "reading" of the world, where social issues are understood as part of wider political and economic structures. It is not simply about exchanging views, but about creating conditions where experience can be understood in relation to structural realities, rather than reduced to the fault of one marginalised group or another.

At the same time, practitioners' accounts point to the limits of dialogue when structural conditions remain unchanged. While dialogue remains central to critical practice, it cannot in itself compensate for under-resourcing or political neglect, and community education cannot be seen as a panacea for all of the ills of society.

Education as a Site of Contestation and Possibility

Despite these constraints, the data also highlights practices of solidarity, creative facilitation, and collective reflection that sustain democratic and egalitarian educational spaces.

Community education emerges here not as a neutral service, but as a contested space that can either reproduce dominant narratives or open possibilities for critical understanding. As one focus group participant explained:

> *[Name of organisation] was always very political and we didn't apologise for it... the people need to look up rather than looking at each other, you know the poor always looking at other poor people and blaming them.*

Freire's concept of a pedagogy of hope is useful in interpreting these accounts. As he argues, the task of the progressive educator is to "unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be" (Freire & Freire, 2021, p. 17). Hope here is not simply optimism, but a sustained commitment to possibility under constraint.

This is reflected in accounts where educators support learners to articulate their own experiences as valid forms of knowledge. One example described a community arts

project in Dublin involving participants from Eritrea and Ukraine, where a collectively created performance explored themes of solidarity and connection. The project was explicitly framed as a counter-narrative to division, even as far-right protests were occurring nearby.

Such practices indicate that sustaining community education requires more than individual commitment. It depends on institutional recognition, stable funding, communities of practice, and policy frameworks that value relational and critical work. Within these conditions, community education becomes a space where dominant narratives can be questioned and reworked through dialogue, reflection, and shared experience.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how community educators encounter and make sense of the growing visibility of far-right rhetoric and activity within their practice. Rather than treating these developments as external disruptions, it has argued that they emerge within conditions shaped by austerity, inequality, and the gradual weakening of community education infrastructures. Far-right narratives circulate through political discourse, media, and online networks, but also take shape in local contexts marked by precarity and disinvestment. In this sense, the rise in far-right sentiment reflects both the top-down production and amplification of narratives and deeper struggles over recognition, belonging, and inequality.

Within this context, educators are required to sustain dialogical and relational practice while also responding to conflict, misinformation, and institutional constraint. This highlights the fragile position of community education as a site where democratic tensions are negotiated in everyday practice.

The paper returns to the idea of “resources of hope” in community education practice. It highlights community education as a way of working shaped by an egalitarian ethos, but one that is continually enacted under conditions of pressure and constraint. Its value lies in how it nonetheless sustains spaces for dialogue, critical reflection, and relational learning, even in difficult contexts.

Central to this is a pedagogical emphasis on values and good-faith dialogue rather than adversarial forms of debate. Across the findings, educators consistently describe the importance of creating conditions where difficult and contested issues can be worked through collectively, without reducing them to positions to be won or lost. This positioning draws on longstanding practitioner knowledge and expertise that support voice, critical reflection, and collective meaning-making. Attending to this history can offer conceptual and practical resources for responding to polarisation, misinformation, and social division in the present. In this framing, hope lies in the persistence of these educational principles and practices.

Reference List

Brown, W. (2015). *Undoing the demos: neoliberalism's stealth revolution* (First Edition. ed.). New York: Zone Books.

Brown, W. (2019). *In the ruins of neoliberalism: the rise of antidemocratic politics in the west*: Columbia University Press.

Cannon, B., King, R., Munnelly, J., & el-Moslemany, R. (2022). *Resisting the far right: civil society strategies for countering the far right in Ireland*. Retrieved from https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/id/eprint/18814/1/Stopfarright%20Final%20Report.pdf

Connolly, B. (2010). Community Education: Perspectives from the Margins. Retrieved from http://nuim.summon.serialssolutions.com/2.0.0/link/0/eLvHCXMwY2AwNtIz0EUrE4yAZWCqRXJacIJSkqFpWqqhWYq5ZaphYqKFQRqwzQDaSuxi7OFs7OVlFOrBxAC7bzEVNLhVUqyXV5qZq5eZqm9sag7snjMbG4AWb_l76QHLUZAUUo3gJsjAD23KKThCwl6IgSk1T4TBCLrjoqRSAb52wkohALGlsVgBtKNDAdjuUgBdMpuZVyzKYOHmGuLsoQuyJB7qmHjQgcy5oDMx4nMTK_PygQFaCl9DEZ-ZGg9ypLEY0GX5eakSDAqWySbAahXYakIJTTVJNTVJTLEwAVZMhklGpqmpwApcksGQZOOlyNAjzcAFmfkGDR_IMLCUFJWmykLCTw4cmAD-7ogs

Creswell, J. W. (2021). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*: SAGE Publications.

Department of Education and Science. (2000). *Learning for life: white paper on adult education*. Dublin: Government of Ireland

Finnegan, F. (2016). The future is unwritten: democratic adult education against and beyond neoliberalism. *Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 46. Retrieved from https://go.exlibris.link/dxytnWM9

Fitzsimons, C. (2017). *Community education and neoliberalism: philosophies, practices and policies in Ireland* (1st ed.). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Fraser, N. (2019). *The old is dying and the new cannot be born: from progressive neoliberalism to Trump and beyond*: Verso Books.

Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin books.

Freire, P., & Freire, A. M. A. (2021). *Pedagogy of hope: reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. London; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

Giroux, H. A. (2014). *Neoliberalism's war on higher education*: Between the Lines.

Greene, J. C. (2007). *Mixed methods in social enquiry*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: why good people are divided by politics and religion*: Penguin Books Limited.

Harvey, B. (2012). *Downsizing the community sector*. Retrieved from Dublin: https://www.siptu.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/file_15560_en.pdf

Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism* (1st ed.). New York;Oxford;: Oxford University Press.

Mondon, A. (2022). Populism, public opinion, and the mainstreaming of the far right: The 'immigration issue' and the construction of a reactionary 'people'. *Politics, 45*(1), 19-36. doi:10.1177/02633957221104726

Mondon, A., & Winter, A. (2020). Reactionary democracy: how racism and the populist far right became mainstream. Retrieved from https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2228910

Mudde, C. (2019). *The far right today*: John Wiley & Sons.

Parenti, M. (2020). *Blackshirts and reds: rational fascism and the overthrow of communism*: City Lights Publishers.

Pelinka, A. (2013). Right-wing populism: concept and typology. In R. Wodak, M. KhosraviNik, & B. Mral (Eds.), *Right wing populism in Europe: politics and discourse* (pp. 3-22). London: Bloomsbury.

Revelli, M. (2019). *The new populism: democracy stares into the abyss*: Verso.

Stanley, J. (2015). *How propaganda works*: Princeton University Press.

West, L. (2016). *Distress in the city: racism, fundamentalism and a democratic education*: UCL IOE Press.

Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2010). *The spirit level: why equality is better for everyone*: Penguin Books Limited.

Williams, R. (1989). *Resources of hope: culture, democracy, socialism*. London;New York;: Verso.

Wodak, R. (2015). *The politics of fear: what right-wing populist discourses mean*: SAGE Publications.

Non-formal education for democracy

Anne Larson & Pia Seidler Cort, Aarhus University

[Work in progress]

(max. 5,000 words including references)

Introduction

A recent study of the state of democracy[1] around the globe (Nord et al., 2026) concludes that democracy is on retreat while autocratic systems are on the rise. According to the study, 74 % of the world population live in autocracies, only 7 % of the world population live in liberal democracies, and the level of democracy in the Western Europe and US is at its lowest level in 50 years. After what has been termed 'the third wave of democratisation' we are now witnessing a 'wave of autocratisation' (Lindberg, 2026). Also in Europe we are witnessing an increasing influence of populism (Gusterson, 2017) and disinformation (McKay & Tenove, 2021) undermining the functioning of the deliberative democracy.

Though Denmark scored highest on the V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) in 2025 (Nord et al., 2026), neither this country is immune to the trends. At the latest parliamentary election, populist parties based on policies of among other topics remigration and anti-establishment gained a landslide result of 17 % of the votes. The leader of one of the parties got the highest number of personal votes, and was afterwards congratulated by among others Victor Orban, Geert Wilders and Tommy Robinson.

The aim of this paper is to study how non-formal adult education may create counteractivities in times with an increase in undemocratic ideologies and behaviour. Through three cases of good practice, we aim at understanding how democratic dialogue can be facilitated through the creation of communities where people have the possibility of sharing experiences and define common ground for action.

[1] The study measures democracy based on five parameters: electoral, liberal, egalitarian, participatory and deliberative.

On democracy

Hirvonen (2023) defines democracy in its core sense as “a mechanism for making decisions that guide, direct, or bind a certain population, and in which that population, *demos*, has control over the directions of the decisions” (p. 93). Based on e.g. the role of the citizens within the systems, Hirvonen (2023) distinguishes between three normative archetypes of democracy: liberal democracy, republican democracy and democracy as a way of life. In short, the focal point in *liberal democracy* is that everybody has an equal say, emphasizing equality and the freedom of individuals. St. Clair, Tett and Black (2025) stresses that “For a society to be considered a liberal democracy, it must feature governance that supports the rights of individuals and groups to lead the life they choose, implying a fundamental commitment to pluralism” (p. 30). *Republican or deliberative democracy* not only stresses the equality of free individuals, but also dialogue, commitment, and mutual respect. Referring back to Dewey’s view of *democracy as a form of social life*, Hirvonen describes democracy as a way of life as “a collective way of deliberating and shaping citizens’ shared lives” (p. 98).

Talking about democracy (and populism), it is important first to clarify who counts as demos, ‘the people’ who are to have influence. Korsgaard and Martin (2002) distinguish between three understandings of ‘the people’: as a social category; as ‘demos’; and as ‘ethnos’. While ‘the people’ as a social category referring to the lower classes in a society is not much used today, the distinction between an demos and etnos understanding of ‘the people’ is still present in actual debates and policy. The understanding ‘the people’ as demos is based on the citizenship living in a common state. It is, thus, based on political boundaries. ‘The people’ as ‘ethnos’ on the other hand, is defined on the basis of a shared language, history and culture – a common ‘soul’ (Korsgaard & Martin, 2002).

With the increased influence of populism and disinformation mentioned in the introduction, the conditions for a mutual respect and debate as are difficult, and thereby some of the basic prerequisites for deliberal democracy. Contrary to deliberate democracy’s emphasis on inclusion as everybody is considered a legitimate part in discussions, populism is based on a dichotomy between an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ (Hirvonen, 2023). What is most often

stressed is the distinction between the 'ordinary people' and an 'elite,' however, referring to the distinction presented above between a 'demos' and an 'ethnos' understanding of 'the people,' it might also be based on ethnic criteria.

A study from 2003 (Krishnarajan) e.g. shows that people tend to judge how democratic a political act is based on the extent to which they agree with the actual policy rather than how it complies with their understanding of democracy. This implies that even supporters of democracy may judge undemocratic acts as democratic, if done by "their side."

Non-formal education and/for democracy

Which role can adult and non-formal education play when it comes to strengthen democracies?

The Danish and Swedish Folk High Schools established from the middle of the 19th Century, combined education and 'bildung', offering the students both vocational qualifications, related to work in the agrarian sector as craftmanship, and enlightenment (Hjermitslev, 2018; Johansson & Bergstedt, 2015). When one of the first 'Danish' Folk High School was established in 1844 in the Northern part of the duchy of Slesvig, the aim was to provide democratic education to the peasants as well as the more nationalistic aim to promote the Danish language that was used among the peasants in the Northern part of the duchy but not by the elite who spoke German. The democratic aim was further stressed by a new principal who took over in 1850. He thus stated that the students at the Folk High School should be given the competences needed to take full part in the democratic institutions after the introduction of parliamentarism in Denmark in 1849 (Holst, 2021).

In Germany, the first 'Volkshochschule' (vhs) was established in 1919 during the Weimar Republic. From the beginning, the vhs had a focus on dialogue (Hinzel & Meilhammer, 2022) – an important aspect of the later deliberal democracy. The relationship to democracy is also indicated by the fact that the vhs was established during the Weimer Republic and closed during the Nazi regime in Germany. When the vhs was reopened after WW2, it was with a focus on education for democracy (Hinzel & Meilhammer, 2022). For the German adult education system in terms of 'Volkshochschulen,' thus, a focus on both learning for democracy – becoming a citizen in a democratic society – and democracy

as a way of life – democratic learning processes – has been part of the raison d'être from the beginning.

Also today, democracy is considered important for at least parts of the non-formal sector. In the 1991 reform of the Swedish non-formal adult education, among the conditions for getting a grant from the state was that the schools supported activities that contributed to "the strengthening and development of democracy" as well as "towards making it possible for people to influence their own life situation and towards creating an interest for participation in the development of society" (Johansson & Bergstedt, 2015, p. 52).

According to St. Clair et al. (2025), adult education still holds a potential when it comes to create counternarratives to anti-democratic narratives. Based on two case studies of non-formal adult education committed to work for civil rights and against discrimination, they argue that adult and non-formal education can help people accessing networks promoting discussions that are not grounded in conflict and hatred against other groups. Stølen (2022) in light of the terror attack in Norway Juli 2011, concludes that to avoid radicalisation that might lead to terror attacks, citizenship education need to focus on the development of critical thinking and deliberation as well as basic knowledge among people, rather than specific competence goals. Learning about democracy, thus, is not sufficient to counter the attraction of conspiracy theories and dehumanisation of individuals.

Looking into adult educators' praxis with migrant learners in times of crisis, Koutoulianou and Gravani (2026) highlights how adult educators can also play a significant role in fostering democratic engagement among their students.

Folk Enlightenment Ukraine: An example

Our study is based on a specific case dealing with non-formal education and democracy carried out under the Erasmus+ programme. The project was conducted between 2024 and 2025 in cooperation between a Danish and a Swedish non-formal education organisation. Besides those two organisations, also organisations from Norway, Finland and Ukraine took part. The project won the European Innovative Teaching Award in 20025 within the theme Citizenship Education – participation in democratic life, common values, and civic engagement. We therefore consider it an example of 'good practice.'

Our analysis of the case draws on an oral presentation from one of the head of the non-residential high school as well as documents published as part of the project.

The overall rationale behind the project was the idea that non-formal education in the form of enlightenment ('folkeoplysning') can contribute to the creation of resilient societies by "fostering resilience, democratic engagement, and social cohesion" (*Learning Folk Enlightenment*). The target group for the project at first hand was Ukrainian refuges who were introduced to the Nordic tradition of non-formal education. At the same time, the intention was also to equip the participants with competences and a network to be used after the war to help rebuild the Ukrainian civic society.

A dilemma in relation to the project was, how to avoid a paternalistic approach telling the Ukrainians the 'right way' to develop a democratic society. A risk also mentioned by Dahlstedt and Nordvall (2011) in their study of the 'export' of the Swedish Folk High School to Tanzania. It was therefore important for the project to actively involve the Ukrainian participant. This involvement it turned out, also showed that not only could the Ukrainians learn from the Nordic NGO's, but the latter could also learn from the Ukrainian experiences: "… you could not help getting both inspired and encouraged. Many small and large civil society-oriented initiatives are performing small wonders" (Brandt, 2024). The role of civil society in the Ukrainian context, thus, showed how important civil society and local networks are in vulnerable societies. A point we intend to look closer into drawing on Mørck et al.'s (2023) work on how viable communities can be created in bottom-up processes with the aim of furthering 'wild' co-creation processes through which the possibilities for democratic action are established.

The final analysis will include two further cases which were also Danish nominees for the award. The cases intersect different national traditions for adult education and democratic participation, different organizations, and target groups, which makes it interesting to study how teaching in democracy and democratic life is conceptualized and unfolded to mobilize the participants.

References

Brandt, H. H. (2024). *Folk Enlightenment Ukraine 2024. A look to the future*. Kompetencehuset. Retrieved 27. April 2026 from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NAQCq3OLrgt6NzyEB-9n86QodkYMw24u/view

Dahlstedt, M., & Nordvall, H. (2011). Paradoxes of Solidarity: Democracy and Colonial Legacies in Swedish Popular Education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *61*(3), 244-261. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713610380445

Gusterson, H. (2017). From Brexit to Trump: Anthropology and the rise of nationalist populism. *American Ethnologist*, *44*(2), 209–214. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12469

Hinzel, H., & Meilhammer, E. (2022). 100 years of Volkshochschule in Germany – 50 years of DVV International: Signposts for local and global comparative perspectives on adult learning and education. *International Review of Education*, *2022*(68), 125–154. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-022-09944-y

Hirvonen, O. (2023). Whose Populism? What Democracy? On the Conceptual and Normative Connections of Populism and Democracy. In E. Lagerspetz & O. Pulkkinen (Eds.), *Between Theory and Practice: Essays on Criticism and Crises of Democracy* (pp. 89-107). Palgrave Macmillan Cham. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41397-1_5

Hjermitslev, H. H. (2018). Mellem dannelse og nytte. *Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift*, *102*(2), 171-183. https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1504-2987-2018-02-07

Holst, C. (2021). Krig eller Corona - nedlukninger af Rødding Højskole fra starten til i dag. *Historisk årbog for Rødding-egnen*, *2021*, 5-24.

Johansson, L., & Bergstedt, B. (2015). Visions unite through the concept of democracy: The school and the Popular Adult Education. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *59*(1), 42-57. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2013.838697

Korsgaard, O., & Martin, S. (2002). A European Demos? The Nordic Adult Education Tradition-Folkeoplysning-Faces a Challenge. *Comparative Education*, *38*(1), 7-16. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3099668

Koutoulianou, E., & Gravani, M. N. (2026). Forstering Active Citizenship. An Adult Educator's Praxis with Migrant Learners in Times of Crisis. In L. Jõgi, G. K. Zarifis, S. Lattke, & M. N. Gravani (Eds.), *Adult Educators in the Face of Crises in Europe. Managing Challenges, Shaping Identities and Changing Cultures* (pp. 39-59). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004747982_003

Krishnarajan, S. (2023). Rationalizing Democracy: The Perceptual Bias and (Un)Democratic Behaviour. *American Political Science Review*, *117*(2), 474-496. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000806

Learning Folk Enlightenment. Introduction to the Establishment of Training Programs in Civil Entrepreneurship. Kompetencehuset & Göteborgs folkhögskola. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1emDQAQykjeaGNx5zAHH1E-j88e8ipXpD/view

Lindberg, S. I. (2026). Fifty years of the third wave(s): from democratization to autocratization. *Democratization*, *33*(3), 676-694. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2026.2615134

McKay, S., & Tenove, C. (2021). Disinformation as a Threat to Deliberative Democracy. *Political Research Quarterly*, *74*(3), 703-717. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912920938143

Mørck, L. L., Nissen, M., Schwartz, I., & Christensen, T. W. (Eds.). (2023). *Fællesskabende praksisser*. Frydenlund Academic.

Nord, M., Altman, D., Fernandes, T., God, A. G., & Lindberg, S. I. (2026). *Democracy Report 2026: Unraveling The Democratic Era*. University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute.

St. Clair, R., Tett, L., & Black, R. (2025). White Christian Nationalism: Adult Education and Threats to Democracy. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, *2025*(186), 28-34. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20564

Stølen, T. (2022). Terror og opplysning: Danning til medborgerskap etter 22. juli. *Nordisk tidsskrift for pedagogikk og kritikk*, *8*, 394-405. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.23865/ntpk.v8.3411

Digital Transformation of Higher Continuing Education in China in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Xing Liu-Schuppener, Steffi Robak, Bin Bai

Aims

This paper examines the conceptualization, governance, and implementation of the digital transformation in Chinese higher continuing education (HCE) within the nation's broader educational informatization strategy. The study aims to analyze the interplay between political frameworks, institutional practices, and individual learning experiences to understand the policy dynamics influencing adult higher education in the context of artificial intelligence (AI). A central research question guides this investigation: How is the digital transformation of HCE in China designed, and which levels of the education system are involved?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

A multi-level analytical framework was employed, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) and Schrader's model of continuing education (2011). This integrated approach incorporates perspectives from educational governance and developmental psychology. The digital transformation of HCE in China is conceptualized as a process operating across four interconnected levels: the macro level of national policies like "Digital China" and "AI + Education"; the meso level concerning institutional governance and inter-organizational collaboration; the micro level of pedagogical innovation, including AI-supported and blended learning; and the individual (nano) level, which focuses on learner motivation, autonomy, and digital competence. These levels are viewed as a dynamic system with feedback loops, illustrating the translation of top-down policies into institutional and individual outcomes.

Methods and Research Design

A qualitative multi-method approach was utilized, incorporating document analysis, expert interviews, and case studies. The analysis included 51 academic publications and 20 national policy documents pertaining to HCE. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with scholars and administrators, with the data coded using MAXQDA. This was supplemented by 17 case studies that provide examples of institutional practices and innovation models. Fieldwork occurred in 2023 at universities in Guangzhou, Xi'an, and Beijing, involving site visits and seminar observations. The analysis was kept current through the continuous monitoring of new publications and policies until 2025.

Data Sources and Evidence

The data corpus comprises national strategic plans, ministerial guidelines, and local implementation documents. These were triangulated with empirical data from expert

interviews and case studies to ensure a comprehensive analysis of how national digitalization policies are implemented at the institutional level.

Results and Conclusions

The findings indicate that the digital transformation of China’s HCE is a deeply integrated and dynamic system. National strategies such as "Digital China" and "AI + Education" have facilitated the shift to "educational informatization 2.0," which involves embedding AI and data governance in adult learning infrastructures. Universities act as key mediators in translating policy into institutional innovation. Concurrently, teaching and learning processes are increasingly utilizing AI-assisted pedagogies and blended models to foster learner autonomy. At the individual level, adult learners show improved digital literacy, flexibility, and innovation competence. Across these interconnected levels, transformation outcomes are the result of ongoing feedback and adaptation between policy, institutional, and learner systems. This has led to an informatized talent development model characterized by adaptability and responsiveness to technological, social, and market changes. The digital transformation in China's HCE serves as both a modernization strategy and a governance mechanism for promoting innovation and lifelong learning.

Relevance to Policy Studies in Adult Education

The Chinese model of informatized talent development integrates top-level policy with bottom-up learner feedback, aligning education with national development objectives. Its flexible learning modes address the personalized needs of adult learners while maintaining systemic coherence. This model supports economic transformation and innovation, reflecting China's capacity to link education with technological and societal shifts. These experiences, particularly in policy guidance, digital transformation, and personalized learning, may offer insights for continuing education reform and comparative policy analysis in other national contexts. By describing this "Chinese model," the paper contributes to the international discourse on the governance and innovation of adult education systems.

CONFERENCE PAPER (work in progress, do not quote)

How have supranational Lifelong Learning policy discourses impacted Tanzanian Adult Education policies?

Consesar Massawe & Jyri Manninen
University of Eastern Finland

Abstract

This paper examines what kind of influence supranational (UNESCO, OECD, EU) lifelong learning (LLL) policy discourses have had on Tanzanian adult learning and education (ALE) policies since 1967. In developing countries, including Tanzania, ALE has been undervalued in favour of formal education. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis is used to analyse Tanzanian ALE policy documents from the first *"Education for Self-reliance"* (1967) to the 2014 *"Education and Training Policy"*. The analysis reveals that the first Tanzanian policy by Julius Nyerere in 1967 might have had influence on UNESCO 1972 policy, not vice versa. Other influences of supranational policy discourses on Tanzanian ALE policies have also been rather small, until more recently the neoliberal shift towards employability and vocational skills, as promoted by the OECD and EU, is seen also in Tanzanian ALE policies.

Keywords: Policy analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, lifelong learning, adult education, Tanzania, OECD, UNESCO, EU

1 Introduction

Tanzania has been an independent East African country since 1964. In 2020 Tanzanian estimated population was 61.7 million and has remained an agriculture-based economy (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Rural areas comprise the country's largest part, where many families reside and expect to provide for their basic needs. Regardless of the numerous efforts of the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations to stand for the improvement of the economy through education, efforts are still required to improve the educational system as a prerequisite to economic development (Tabulawa, 2013).

Tanzanian adult learning and education (ALE) system can be traced back to the early 1960s (Mushi, 1991, 351), when it served a fundamental purpose in almost every sphere of life in Tanzania, and economically proved its need (Heisel, 1979). Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, is acknowledged to be one of the few African leaders who accentuated ALE's importance. Avoseh (2001, 4) acknowledged that "Julius Nyerere was one African leader who tried to make ALE a weapon that the Tanzanians could use to tap the benefits of a civil society". In his presidential address to the parliament in 1967, Nyerere said, “The education provided must therefore encourage the development in each citizen of three things: An enquiring mind; an ability to learn from what others do, rejecting or adapting it to his own needs; and a basic confidence in his own position as a free and equal member of the society, who values others and is valued by them for what he does and not for what he obtains" (Nyerere, 1967, 421).

In this paper we analyse Tanzanian education policy documents between 1967 and 2014 using critical discourse analysis (CDA; Fairclough, 2013), and how supranational (OECD, UNESCO, EU) LLL policy discourses have influenced them. ALE policy analysis is proven important (eg. Barros, 2012, 120; Biesta, 2006, 170), but there is a need for more studies regarding the sub-Saharan countries.

There has been some analysis of sub-Saharan ALE systems (f.ex. Aitchison, 2017), but only two studies (Bhalalusesa, 2021; Owusu-Agyeman, 2019) have analysed ALE policy discourses.

The research questions are:

1. How adult learning and education (ALE) is visible in Tanzanian education policy documents between 1967 and 2014?
2. What kind of policy discourses can be found in these policy documents?
3. Is there a linkage between Tanzanian ALE policies and supranational LLL policy discourses?

One aim is to discuss, how suitable the supranational LLL policies and terminology (which are based on western societies, culture and norms) are for Tanzanian society and culture.

We will use term ALE (adult learning and education), when referring to Tanzanian policy documents. For clarity, we use term LLL (lifelong learning) to refer to all supranational policies, even though 'lifelong learning' as a term was not used there until 1980s. Before that all policy documents starting from 1940s used 'adult education', until in 1980s there was a discursive change from 'adult education' to 'lifelong learning' (Barros, 2012; Milana, 2012a; Rubenson, 2009). This was not merely linguistic or semantic change but intricately tied to political influences as well. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

2 Supranational Lifelong Learning Policy Discourses

Supranational LLL policies have been debated by many researchers and policymakers, for example what shapes LLL policies in the history and contemporary context (Barros, 2012; Milana, 2012a). Grewal (2012) took examples from the Nordic and the Anglo-Saxon countries how their history and tradition related to the LLL policies in these countries: Nordic policies are entranced by the long tradition of state support for equality and well-established obligations to full employment , and therefore Nordic ALE system is relatively well prepared to meet various educational needs. That contrasts the LLL policies in Anglo-Saxon countries, which have weaker traditions of social provision, and tied to neoliberal, economic, market-driven policies (Clarke & Winch, 2006).

Rubenson and Beddie (2020) analysed the changing meanings of LLL, starting from the middle 1960s, when "education permanente" was introduced by UNESCO as the master concept in education restructuring. Later, in 1973, OECD introduced term "recurrent education" (Hake, 2018), as a response to new social, political, cultural and economic challenges. Literature review shows that supranational organizations (UNESCO, EU and OECD) have defined several a bit different LLL policies since 1940s. UNESCO's policies have been based more on Regmi's (2015) humanistic model, where ALE is used to strengthen democracy, social capital and well-being, by organizing for example citizenship and community education. A good example of humanistic model is the Faure (1972) report "Learning to be" published by UNESCO focusing on individual development and self-directed learning. The idea was "self-made" rather than "being made" so that individuals could work towards achieving essential goals of democracy such as self-awareness, self-evaluation and autonomous learning. Rubenson and Beddie (2020) named this as the first generation of LLL.

The currently dominating aims in OECD and EU policies are to increase production, competition, privatisation and employability to enhance economic growth., which is a good example of Regmi's (2015) human capital model. The common aim has been to create educated societies through LLL, focusing especially on vocational training and education, to develop a skilled workforce to support

socio-economic development, thereby increasing global stability, sustainability, and interdependence (Borja & Castells, 2013). Rubenson and Beddie (2020) named this as second generation of LLL, emphasizing the intertwining of the economy and education. The economist worldview was dominant, especially in neo-liberal industrial countries. This shift was evident in the OECD report "Education and the economy in a changing society" (OECD, 1989) and further developed in "Lifelong Learning for all" (OECD, 1996) which through human capital theory as posed by the EU, underscores varied learning modes ranging from participation to formal or nonformal education and informal learning. LLL is the main link between economic and educational strategies in the 21st century (Dowrick, 1989). This view dominated the second generation of lifelong learning and has been criticised by scholars, because the policy focused on employability and competitiveness, neglecting active citizenship, personal development, social inclusion, and civic and health education (Rubenson & Beddie, 2020).

This criticism resulted in the third generation of LLL, which considers the dynamic interrelation between civil society, market and the state, but still depends mainly on the economy and market, as economic relevance and business interests are prioritised in LLL policies, while civil society has less priority. Business sector is given a top role to define what skills, competencies, and know-how the education system should produce and what kind of LLL policies should be practised (compare Marginson, 1997). This third generation LLL has been advocating ALE in many ways (Dale, 2009; Nóvoa, 2010). For example, Kleibrink (2011) and Rasmussen (2014) argue that the EU strives to contribute to the unification of Europe via education. This is executed by establishing monitoring mechanisms and indicators like participation in LLL, progress of member states, and promoting preferable norms, values and LLL discourses (Mikulec, 2018; Carney, 2003).

This discourse has also been manifested in the OECD's policies, where demand for education is a result of technological changes. The OECD (1989, 19) report "Education and Economy in a Changing Society" articulated that the performance of the countries' economy lies in the effectiveness of education and the capabilities of learning in a country.

This literature review indicates that the supranational policy discourses have faced three transitions, which are documented in previous studies as well. The first is (1) the shift from Regmi's (2015) humanistic model to human capital model and neoliberal agendas, described above. Next two are terminological: (2) the shift from 'adult' to 'lifelong', and (3) the shift from 'education' to 'learning'. These two terminological shifts are described separately, but they are linked to each other: discourse shifted from '*adult education*' to '*lifelong learning*'.

Shift from Regmi's (2015) humanistic model to human capital model was clearly visible, when the humanistic model of UNESCO (1972) was later replaced by human capital models by OECD and EU, and also adopted in newer UNESCO policies.

Terminological shift from 'adult' to 'lifelong' in supranational policies has also been observed for example by Rogers, A (2006) and Milana (2012a,b), who posit that 'lifelong [learning]' discourse has gained significant focus within the policy agenda in recent years.

Shift from concrete 'education' to more abstract 'learning' is also clear. Starting from UNESCO Elsinore Conference in 1949 'education' was used, emphasizing educational cooperation and education beyond traditional schooling (Centeno, 2011). UNESCO used terms 'education permanente' (1965), 'continuing education' (1970), 'adult education' (1976) and 'lifelong education' (1980). Only deviation from this terminology was "Learning to be" report (Faure, 1972). The first OECD policy published in 1973 was "Recurrent Education: A Strategy for Lifelong Learning", and

paved the way to discursive change from ‘education’ to ‘learning’ which have been in use since 1990’s. Next OECD policy documents were “Lifelong Learning for All” (1996) and “Action Plan on Adult Learning: It's Always a Good Time to Learn” (2007). Same change took place in UNESCO in 1996 (“Learning: The Treasure Within”), followed by “Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning” (1998) and “Revisiting Lifelong Learning for the 21st Century” (2001). First EU policy was titled “Memorandum on Lifelong Learning” (2000), after that all five policies had term “adult learning” in the title.

This seemingly rhetorical shift may have implications for policy implementation, because ‘learning’ is easily interpreted as the individual’s responsibility, while ‘education’ is an activity that need to be organized and financed either by the state, employers, or individuals themselves. Consequently, this terminological change may influence the allocation of resources for ALE.

Also, the linguistic transition from ‘adult’ to ‘lifelong’ is not merely semantic but tied to political influences, a finding also acknowledged by Milana (2012b) and Rubenson (2009). Explanations why ‘adult [education]’ was replaced with ‘lifelong [learning]’ are documented in several studies (e.g. Benavot et. al., 2022; Milana, 2012a,b). ‘Adult education’ is associated with liberal arts and civic or community education objectives, while ‘lifelong learning’ is a more neoliberal term, stressing the importance of self-directed skills development throughout a person's life, mainly for career purposes.

We will analyse next Tanzanian ALE policy documents to find out, how these supranational LLL policy discourses have impacted Tanzanian ALE policies.

3 Data collection and analysis

Data in discourse analysis are Tanzanian education policy documents (1967 – 2014; table 1) acquired from websites of Tanzanian government agencies such as the Institute of adult education and the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. The literature review of supranational (OECD, UNESCO, EU) LLL policy discourses give a conceptual framework for the empirical analysis of Tanzanian ALE policies.

Table 1. Tanzanian education policy documents used as data

Policy documents	Source
Education for Self-reliance	Nyerere (1967)
Education and training policy	Ministry of Education (1995)
Tanzania Development Vision 2025	United Republic of Tanzania Planning Commission (2000)
National Youth Development Policy	Ministry of Labour (2007)
National Strategy for Growth and re-education of Poverty II	United Republic of Tanzania (2013)
Education and training policy	Ministry of Education (2014)

In many policy documents listed above the focus have been in school and formal education. We will select for policy analysis those parts where adult education is mentioned. Table 2 shows an example of Tanzanian education policy texts used in this study as data.

Table 2. Example of Tanzanian education policy texts

Policy Document	Policy text (English)	Policy text (Swahili)	Analytical Observations
1967 Education for self-reliance	”..and by the custom of sharing to which young people were taught to conform, the values of the society were transmitted. Education was thus "informal"; every adult was a teacher to a greater or lesser degree. But this lack of formality did not mean that there was no education, nor did it affect its importance to the society. Indeed, it may have made the education more directly relevant to the society in which the child was growing up.” (p. 2)	”..na kwa desturi za kushirikiana walizofunzwa vijana, mila za nchi ziliendelezwa. Kwa hiyo elimu waliyopata haikuwa ya kujifunza darasani; kila mtu mzima alikuwa mwalimu kwa njia yake. Lakini kukosa madarasa maana yake si kwamba hakukuwako elimu, wala hakukupunguza umuhimu wa elimu katika Taifa. Na kwa kweli inawezekana elimu aliyokuwa akiipata kijana enzi zile ijapo si ya darasani, ilikuwa elimu inayomfaa kuishi katika jamaa yake.” (p. 2)	- Self-reliant education system - Functionally relevant citizens - Classroom decentralization to the community - Practise rather than certification - Education is a social system - Collective teaching & responsibility - Redefining society's functional education - Critiquing western education

This discursive nature of education policy texts makes it possible to use Fairclough's (1995, 57) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a tool for critical LLL policy research (Rogers R., 2004). Fairclough assumes that any form of language is a communicative event, “a discourse”. He agrees with Foucault and maintains that CDA is concerned with how language can be used as a tool to exercise power (Garrity, 2010). Fairclough produced a three-dimension model for critical discourse analysis (Figure 1) which was used in our study to identify and analyse the Tanzanian policy texts.

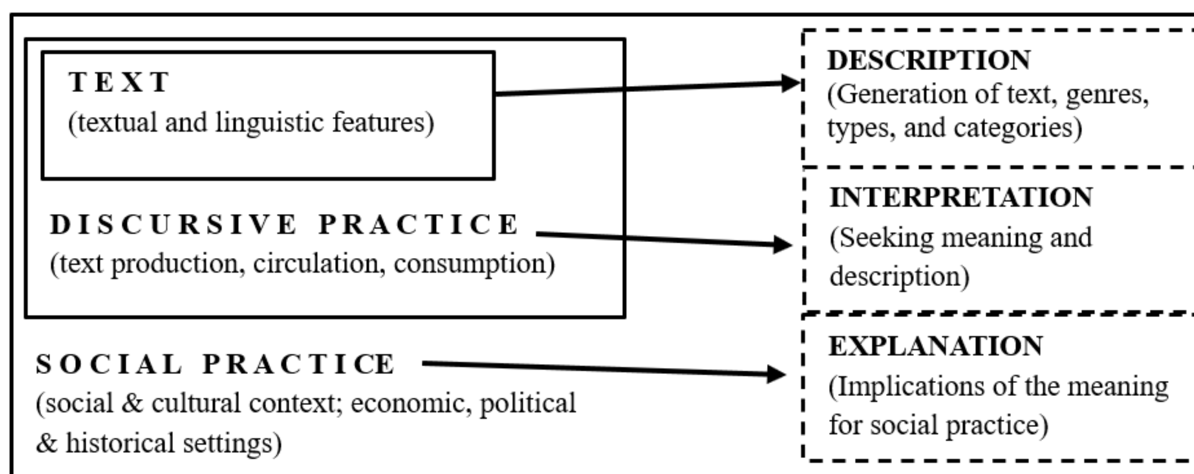


Figure 1: Fairclough's (1995) Three-Dimensional Framework for Analysing Discourse

Fairclough's three dimensions are text, discursive practice, and social practice (Potter & Wetherell, 2014; Fairclough, 1992). *Text* can be images, speech, writings or all three of these together. It refers to the textual and linguistic features of discourse. *Discursive practice* involves text production, circulation, and consumption within a specific context. *Social practice* subsumes the analysis of a deeper cultural and social context where discourse practices and language are situated. It involves the analysis of the economic, political, and historical settings (here Tanzania) that frame the production and interpretation of texts (Fairclough, 2013; Kuo, 2007). Table 3 shows an example of analysis.

Table 3. Example how Fairclough's (1995) framework was used to analyse Tanzanian policy documents

Original policy text (English & Swahili; Education for self-reliance, 1967)	**Text** (tone, grammar, metaphors, wording)	**Discursive practice** (text production, circulation and interpretation)	**Social practice** (cultural, economic, political, historical and social context)
"It must encourage the development of a proud, independent, and free citizenry which relies upon itself for its own development, and which knows the advantages and the problems of co-operation." (p. 25) *"Haina budi ipande mawazo ya taifa la kijamaa tunalotaka kulijenga. Haina budi ikazanie kufunzwa kwa wananchi wanaojivunia uhuru na kujitegemea kwa maendeleo yao wenyewe, na ambao wanafahamu faida na shida zakushirikiana"* (p. 21)	***Haina budi*** (must, obligation) ***Kupanda Mawazo*** (encourage) metaphor; nurture the seed of independence,and freedom ***kujitegemea*** (independence), freedom to choose where one belongs, breaking away from the colonial system ***Yao wenyewe*** (their own) - metaphorical; seeing the importance of striving for it, because YOU will benefit from it. ***Taifa la kijamaa*** (framing the idea of socialism *ujamaa* but after developing the self.	**Text production:** Nyerere's raw speech was later added by his writing. **Circulated** through embeddedness in curricula and education policies, **Interpretation**: importance of self-reliance for self and community, collectiveness, socialism *(ujamaa),*Regmi: **humanistic model**	**Cultural:** Sharing, oneness, belonging, cooperating **Economic**: neoliberalism, education for economic liberation **Historic:** Independence, intention to shift from colonial education to self-reliance education, relevant and relatable to societal dilemmas **Political:** Socialism, reinforcement of civic education, patriotism **Social**: Collective development and achievements, self-reliance, a sense of belonging

Analysis of policy documents aims to reveal the underlying ideologies and values (Shapiro, 2019) and employs insights from a macro-level policy trajectory approach to examine the potential influence of supranational LLL policy discourses on Tanzania's ALE policies. According to Burbules and Torres (2013) and Lingard (2013), organizations such as UNESCO, OECD and EU have significantly impacted the shaping of developing countries' LLL policies.

4 Results: Tanzanian ALE policy changes

4.1 Tanzanian ALE policy periods

Tanzanian ALE system started to develop after independence in early 1960s (Mushi, 1991, 351). The policy promotor was Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, who saw ALE as a "weapon that the ordinary people of Tanzania could use to tap the benefits of a civil society" (Avoseh, 2001, 4). Nyerere's ALE policy is close to Regmi's (2015) humanistic model. Later Tanzanian ALE policies have gradually changed towards human capital model as described in the following table.

Table 4. Key Tanzanian ALE policies, focus and terminology

POLICY PERIOD	**KEY POLICIES**	**POLICY FOCUS**	**TERMINOLOGY** (in Swahili and English)
1960s	Education for Self-Reliance (1967)	**Ujamaa** (socialism); Self and society self-reliance. Liberation from colonial education and systems; Rural development; Citizenship; Literacy.	**Elimu ya Kujitegemea** (Education for Self-Reliance); **Ujamaa** (Socialism) **Elimu ya Watu Wazima** (Adult education); **Kusoma na Kuandika** (Literacy)
1970-1980s	[no ALE policies]		

1990s	Education and Training policy (1995)	Literacy Education for everyone Integration of nonformal education	**Elimu ya watu wazima** (Adult education); **Kusoma na kuandika** (Literacy); **Elimu ya Sekondari kwa Njia ya Masafa** (secondary distance education); **Elimu maisha** (lifelong education)
2000–2005	- Tanzania Development Vision 2025 (2000); - National Youth Development Policy (2000)	Education as tool for learning society and force for national development	**Elimu** (Education); **Elimu ya Watu Wazima** (Adult Education); **Jamii inayojifunza** (Learning society); Vocational education and training
2005–2010	- National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (2013)	Adult and nonformal education sub-sector strategy for promoting literacy, poverty reduction, and skills development for national growth; Vocational training and skills education; Adult education and skills orientation	**Elimu Isiyo Rasmi** (nonformal Education); **Elimu ya Watu Wazima** (adult education); literacy, distance education, vocational education and training
2014 - present	Education and Training Policy (2014);	Education Sector Development Programme; Integrated Community-Based Adult Education; Inclusive learning pathways and adult education linked to employability; Alignment with SDG education reforms and Tanzania Vision 2025; Vocational training and skills education.	**Elimu ya Watu Wazima** (adult education); **Elimu ya Maisha Yote** (lifelong education) **Elimu endelevu** (continuous education) **Elimu ya Masafa** (distance education); Vocational Training

The first Tanzanian policy document was "*Education for Self-reliance"*, which was based on philosophy of Julius Nyerere and had an emphasis on community-based education, on humanistic values and on the idea '*Elimu Haina Mwisho'* (education has no end). Education must encourage the development in each citizen's enquiring mind, ability to learn, and basic confidence in his/her own position as a free and equal member of the society, who values others and is valued for what he/she does and not for what he/she obtains (Nyerere, 1967, 421). This Tanzanian ALE policy was not influenced by supranational organizations, instead it was "domestic", progressive and even radical in some respects. Interestingly, it seems that Nyerere's ALE policy has influenced the UNESCO LLL policy published five years later in 1972 in Faure report (Mulenga, 2001; Hinzen, 2006). Nyerere's views on adult education were therefore globally influential, particularly among UNESCO experts, aligned with UNESCO's focus on literacy and community development agendas and with Education for All (EFA) goals. Nyerere was also linked to ICAE (Kassam & Hall, 2022) giving a ground-breaking speech in Dar es Salaam in 1976, published as the Dar es Salaam Declaration under the titles "Adult education and development", "Development is for man, by man, and of man" and "Liberated man - the purpose of development". Nyerere was also the first Honorary President of the ICAE, followed later by Paulo Freire.

This humanistic element can be found in some supranational policies, where ALE is advocated as a human right, especially for those whose only way to develop as individuals and as members of society is through adult education. UNESCO (2019, 33) listed five major principles in designing LLL policies, and the first was that LLL is *"part of the human right to education"*.

In 1970s and 1980s there were no relevant Tanzanian ALE policies. Mulligan-Hansel (1999) and Werrema (2012) posit that the slowness and stagnancy in ALE policy progress was because of the ruling political party (CCM), which long period in power since 1977 resulted in lack of urgency when making, reforming, and implementing ALE policies, focus being at school level policies.

After regime change in 1990's more attention was given to education policy formation and reforms to achieve a middle-income economy by 2025 (Mushi, 2009). Mushi also acknowledges that the revival and subsequent reformation of the Education and Training Policy (1995), the Technical Education and Training Policy (1996), the National Policy on Higher Education (1999) and the Policy Information Technology and Communication for Basic Education (2007) compelled the formation of the latest 2014 education and training policy. These policies were made under the president's office by three core education administrative authorities; The Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (URT, 2003; Mushi, 2009). It is worth noting that even these more neoliberal ALE policies mentioned at least in their foreword UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) goal, human rights and social justice (Mushi, 2009; Borja & Castells, 2013).

These policies were developed by organisations like Ministry of Education, and Institute of Adult Education, supported by UNESCO, to improve literacy, awareness and skill levels of adults in Tanzania (URT, 2003; Mushi, 2009). Two exemplary programs are Community-Based Adult Education and Complimentary Basic Education in Tanzania, primarily based in rural areas. Another widely practised program in most parts of the country is *Mkakati wa Elimu Maalum kwa Watu Waliokosa* (URT, 2003; Tsatsaroni & Evans, 2014), which is a second chance education offering a quick road to education for adults who never had access to any form of formal education (URT, 2007; 2012). The 2014 policy integrated the terms '*Haki Elimu'* which literally translates to 'Education right'. The major focus was inclusive and equitable access to quality education for everyone.

4.2 Impact of supranational LLL policy discourses on Tanzanian ALE policies

It seems that mainly UNESCO's more humanistic LLL policy have had impact on Tanzanian ALE policies. This is related to the close cooperation with Nyerere and the fact that UNESCO's focus is more on developing countries. EFA has drawn attention to need to improve education at all levels, on a lifetime spectrum. UNESCO has been paying more attention to all kinds of education, including adult education, as they recognise the significance of LLL (UNESCO, 2009; 2015).

The analysis revealed that this influence helped adult education to get more attention in the Tanzanian policy agendas. Examples of UNESCO documents in which the LLL as human rights discourse is widely observed are *Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education*, *Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning* and the *Belem Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 1976; 1998; 2010). Statements like "fundamental *aspect of the right to education* and facilitates the exercise of the right to participate in political, cultural, artistic and scientific life" (UNESCO, 1976, 2). The same discourse of LLL as a human right was recontextualised by the *Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning,* where it is articulated that LLL is "*More than a right…* it is both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society (UNESCO, 1998, 1), and that *"adult literacy.... in a rapidly changing world, is a fundamental human right" (ibid., 4)*. Twelve years after the Hamburg declaration, UNESCO adopted the *Belem Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2010), where in its preamble the discourse of adult education as a human right was stated as "adult education is recognised as an essential element of the right to education."

Tanzanian ALE policies since 2000 have had more focus on vocational education and skills. Four out of the seven Tanzanian policy documents were deeply swayed by the neo-liberal agenda. This was evident in the policy statements, which often prioritised supranational policy objectives over national state needs. The affected policies are The *Tanzania development vision 2025 (2020), National Youth Development Policy (2007), National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (2013) and Education and Training Policy (2014).*This neo-liberal discourse has made Tanzanian ALE policies

to focus on achieving supranational-led objectives, such as a focus on skills development and the conversion of adult learners into what is known as human capital, as essential for the economic ills (Preece, 2013; UIL, 2017a, 73). Here occurs a clear shift to Regmi's (2015) human capital model and neo-liberal discourse, also UNESCO documents (Preece, 2013; Tuckett, 2022). It is also visible in Tanzanian policy document, which Ministry of education and vocational training wrote in cooperation with the UNESCO national commission of the United Republic of Tanzania:

> *"We are standing at the threshold of the 21st century, a century that will be characterised by competition…, advanced technological capacity, high productivity, modern and evident transport, and communication infrastructure… we must, as a nation, withstand the expected intensive economic competition ahead of us through entrepreneurship, market-led economy to achieve a growth and a middle-income economy……"* (Tanzania Development Vision 2025, 2000).

This kind of neoliberal discourse is an indicator that the Tanzanian government is not entirely controlling some of its own ALE policy agendas.

4.3 Impact of supranational LLL policy discourses on Tanzanian ALE terminology

It seems that the shift in supranational policy discourses from 'education' (Swahili: *elimu*) to 'learning' (Swahili: *kujifunza* [verb] or *inayojifunza* [noun]) has not happened in Tanzanian policy documents. Term 'education' is mostly used in the policy texts and documents. When the policy texts written in Swahili language were analysed, for example in 1995 a combination of Swahili words *elimu ya watu wazima* was used, which translates as 'adult education'. Only in one policy document from 2000 the term "Learning society" (*Jamii inayojifunza*) is used.

Also, the shift from 'adult' to 'lifelong' has not happened so clearly in Tanzanian policy documents; terms 'adult' (*watu wazima*) and 'lifelong' (*maisha yote*) has co-existed in 1995 and 2014 policy documents, but 'adult' has been in use in all policies since the 1967. An explanation for this might be that, according to Benavot et. al. (2022, 178), in many African countries 'adult education' better describes the basic needs of adults and society: literacy, community development, nature, human agency, and human solidarity.

It seems that 'lifelong learning' has replaced 'adult education' in supranational policy agenda (table 5), but Tanzanian policy documents have only partly embraced LLL discourse by using 'lifelong education' (*Elimu ya Maisha*).

Table 5. A shift from 'adult education' to 'lifelong learning' terminology since 1960s

Organization	**1960s**	**1970s**	**1980s**	**1990s →**
UNESCO	Adult education Éducation Permanente	Adult education Continuing education Lifelong Education	Lifelong education	Adult learning Lifelong Learning
OECD	Recurrent Education	Recurrent Education Lifelong learning	Adult learning	Adult learning Lifelong Learning
EU				Lifelong Learning
Tanzania	*Elimu ya kujitegemea* (Education for Self-Reliance)	(no ALE policy)	(no ALE policy)	Elimu ya Maisha (lifelong education); elimu ya watu wazima (adult education)

Therefore, our results show that this supranational discursive change in terminology has not influenced the Tanzanian ALE policies. ’Adult learning’ is articulated to be ideologically rooted in the humanistic approach, while ‘lifelong learning’ is rooted in economic determinism (Volles,2016). These terms and policies are based on western culture and norms; how are these supposed to fit a society with a completely different background, pace of development and culture? This may be why the terms are not used in Tanzanian documents, because putting an ideology from a totally different background into practice is difficult.

5 Discussion and Conclusions

The results show that the first Tanzanian ALE policy (Education for self-reliance in 1967), based on Nyerere’s philosophy, was “homemade” and progressive in many ways. It was developed a few years before UNESCO published “Learning to be” (Faure, 1972). In 1970s and 1980s new ALE policies were not developed. From 1995 on Tanzanian ALE policies were developed on more regular basis but did not absorb LLL terminology.

Some influence of supranational neoliberal discourses on Tanzanian ALE policies was recognised. National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (2013) and Tanzania development vision 2025 (2000) clearly emphasize the economic benefits of ALE. It is evident that policymaking has undergone internationalization, but it seems that Tanzania has avoided many external directives and influences. Looking ahead, it is imperative that future studies delve deeper into Tanzanian ALE discourses. The enduring influence of the original Education for Self-Reliance (1967) policy and philosophy on contemporary ALE policies underscores their lasting relevance (Mushi, 2009).This tension between neo-liberal agendas against values related to human rights, social justice, and inclusion makes the balancing between economic growth and social justice within ALE policies difficult, particularly in developing nations like Tanzania.

Our data shows that Tanzanian education policy documents focus mainly on formal and basic education, and adult education is mentioned in policies only sporadically. The absence of a dedicated Tanzanian ALE policy risks undervaluing its significance. Consequently, we recommend the creation of exclusive Tanzanian ALE policy documents to provide much-needed clarity and direction. ALE policies should expand beyond economic development to encompass broader societal aspects such as self-awareness, health, social engagement, and civic education. NGOs should play a more significant role in ALE, particularly in training, policy development, and implementation.

In conclusion, future research should use critical analysis of the rhetorical versus legitimate impact of ALE policies, examine the wider societal benefits of ALE beyond economic factors, and investigate the influence of supranational discourses on Tanzanian ALE policies. Such research is imperative for informed policymaking and authentic policy learning, ensuring that ALE serves as a catalyst for comprehensive societal development, extending far beyond economic dimensions.

References

Aitchison, J. (2017). The status of adult learning and education in sub-Saharan Africa: regional report. CONFINTEA VI Mid-term review. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

Avoseh, M. B. (2001). Learning to be active citizens: Lessons of traditional Africa for lifelong learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *20*(6), 479-486.

Barros, R. (2012). From lifelong education to lifelong learning. Discussion of some effects of today's neoliberal policies. *European journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *3*(2), 119-134.

Benavot, A., Hoppers, C.O., Lockhart, A.S. et al. (2022). Reimagining adult education and lifelong learning for all: Historical and critical perspectives. International Review of Education 68, 165–194. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-022-09955-9

Bhalalusesa, E. P. (2021). Decentralized Management of Adult and Non-Formal Education in Tanzania: Issues and Challenges. In: Proceedings of the International Conference to Celebrate 50 Years of Adult Education in Tanzania. School of education, University of Dar Es Salaam, 50 – 59.

Biesta, G. (2006). What's the point of lifelong learning if lifelong learning has no point? On the democratic deficit of policies for lifelong learning. *European educational research journal*, *5*(3-4), 169-180.

Borja, J., & Castells, M. (2013). *Local and global: the management of cities in the information age*. Routledge.

Burbules, N. C., & Torres, C. A. (2013). *Globalization and education: Critical perspectives*. Routledge.

Carney, S. (2003). Globalisation, neo-liberalism and the limitations of school effectiveness research in developing countries: The case of Nepal. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *1*(1), 87-

Centeno, V. (2011). Lifelong learning: a policy concept with a long past but a short history. *International journal of lifelong education*, *30*(2), 133-150.

Clarke, L., & Winch, C. (2006). A European skills framework - but what are skills? Anglo-Saxon versus German concepts. *Journal of Education and Work*, *19*(3), 255-269.

CEC (2000). A memorandum on lifelong learning. Commission of the European Communities.

Dale, R., & Robertson, S. (Eds.). (2009). Globalisation and Europeanisation in education. Symposium Books Ltd.

Dowrick, S., & Nguyen, D. T. (1989). OECD comparative economic growth 1950-85: catch-up and convergence. *The American economic Review*, 1010-1030.

EU (2009). New skills for new jobs: anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs. Working document. European Commission.

Fairclough, N. (1992). Discourse and Social Change. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis*. Harlow: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2013). Critical discourse analysis and critical policy studies. *Critical policy studies*, *7*(2), 177-197.

Faure, E. (1972). *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow*. UNESCO.

Garrity, Z. (2010). Discourse analysis, Foucault and social work research. *Journal of Social Work*, *10*(2), 193-210.

Grewal, R. (2012). Globalization and adult learning and education policies in Nordic and Anglo-Saxon countries. European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 3(1), 23

Hake, B. J. (2018). Éducation permanente in France en route to 'permanent education'at the Council of Europe? Revisiting a projet social to create 'a long life of learning'. *History of education*, *47*(6), 779-805.

Harney, K., Heikkinen, A., Rahn, S., & Schemmann, M. (2002). *Lifelong Learning: One Focus, Different Systems. Studien zur Erwachsenenbildung, Band 19*. Peter Lang AG, European Academic Publishers, Moosstrasse 1, PO Box 350, CH-2542 Pieterlen, Switzerland.

Heisel, M. A. (1979). Adult education in Tanzania. *International Social Work*, *22*(3), 38-46.

Hinzen, H. (2006). The Links between Julius K. Nyerere and the ICAE: From the First World Assembly in 1976 in Dares Salaam to the Next in 2007 in Nairobi. Adult Education and Development 67/2006. https://www.dvv-international.de/en/adult-education-and-development/editions/aed-672006/icae7th-world-assembly/the-links-between-julius-k-nyerere-and-the-icae-from-the-first-world-assembly-in-1976-in-dares-salaam-to-the-next-in-2007-in-nairobi

Kassam, Y. & Hall, B. (2022). Reflections on the Impact of Mwalimu Nyerere's Vision on Adult and Non-formal Education. In: Hall, B., Mushi, P. & Sanga, P. (2022). Reigniting Hope: 50 Years of Adult Education in Tanzania. Dar es Salaam University Press (DUP).

Kleibrink, A. (2011). The EU as a Norm Entrepreneur: the case of lifelong learning. *European journal of education*, *46*(1), 70-84.

Kuo, S. H. (2007). Social change and discursive change: analyzing conversationalization of media discourse in Taiwan. *Discourse Studies*, *9*(6), 743-765.

Lingard, B. (2013). Policy borrowing, policy learning: Testing times in Australian schooling. In *Politics, Policies and Pedagogies in Education* (pp. 68-85). Routledge.

Marginson, S. (1997). *Educating Australia: Government, economy and citizen since 1960*. Cambridge University Press.

Mikulec, B. (2018). Normative presumptions of the European Union's adult education policy. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *50*(2), 133-151.

Milana, M. (2012a). Globalisation, transnational policies and adult education. *International Review of Education*, *58*, 777-797.

Milana, M. (2012b). Political globalization and the shift from adult education to lifelong learning. European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol.3, No.2, 2012, pp. 103-117.

Milana, M., Rasmussen, P., & Holford, J. (2016). The role of adult education and learning policy in fostering societal sustainability. *International Review of education*, *62*, 523-540.

Mulenga, D. (2001). Mwalimu Julius Nyerere: a critical review of his contributions to adult education and postcolonialism. International journal of lifelong education, 2001-11, Vol.20 (6), p. 446-470

Mulligan-Hansel, K. M. (1999). *The political economy of contemporary women's organizations in Tanzania: socialism, liberalization and gendered fields of power*. The University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Mushi, P. A. K. (2009). *History and development of education in Tanzania*. African books collective.

Mushi, P. A. (1991). Origins and development of adult education innovations in Tanzania. *International review of education*, *37*, 351-363.

National Bureau of Statistics (2022). Tanzania National Panel Survey Report (NPS) - Wave 5, 2020 - 2021. Dodoma, Tanzania: NBS

Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (2014). Discourse and social psychology. *The Discourse Studies Reader*, 244-255.\

Preece, J. (2013). Africa and international policy making for lifelong learning: textual revelations. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *33*(1), 98-105.

Nyerere, J. K. (1967). Education for self-reliance. *CrossCurrents*, *18*(4), 415-434.

Owusu-Agyeman, Y. (2019). An analysis of theoretical perspectives that define adult learners for effective and inclusive adult education policies. International Review of Education, 65: 929–953. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-019-09811-3,

Rasmussen, P. (2014). Adult learning policy in the European commission: Development and status. In *Adult education policy and the European Union: Theoretical and methodological perspectives* (pp. 15-34). Brill.

Regmi, K. D. (2015). Lifelong learning: Foundational models, underlying assumptions and critiques. *International Review of Education*, *61*, 133-151.

Rogers, A. (2006). Escaping the slums or changing the slums? Lifelong learning and social transformation. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *25*(2), 125-137.

Rogers, R. (2004). An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education. In *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education* (pp. 31-48). Routledge.

Rubenson, K. (2009). OECD educational policies and world hegemon. In R. Mahon & S. McBride (Eds.), The OECD and transnational governance (pp. 96-116). Vancouver: UBC Press.

Rubenson, K. & Beddie, F. (2020). Policy Formation in Adult Education and Training. In Foley, G. (Ed.) (2020). *Dimensions of Adult Learning*. Adult education and training in a global era, pp. 153-167. McGraw-Hill Education.

Shapiro, M. J. (2019). Language and Power: The Spaces of Critical Interpretation 1. In *Language, symbolism, and politics* (pp. 269-287). Routledge.

Tabulawa, R. (2013). *Teaching and learning in context: Why pedagogical reforms fail in Sub-Saharan Africa*. African Books Collective.

Tsatsaroni, A., & Evans, J. (2014). Adult numeracy and the totally pedagogised society: PIAAC and other international surveys in the context of global educational policy on lifelong learning. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, *87*, 167-186.

Tuckett, A. (2022). High ambitions, but inadequate and declining resources: From CONFINTEA V to CONFINTEA VII. *Convergence*, *43*(2), 89-98.

UNESCO (1976). Recommendation on the development of adult education. *Canadian Commission for UNESCO.*

UNESCO (1997). Adult Education; The Hamburg Declaration; The Agenda for the Future. UNESCO Institute for Education.

UNESCO (1998). The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning. UNESCO.

UNESCO (2000). Dakar Framework for Action—Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments. In *World Education Forum, UNESCO, Dakar, Senegal held on April* (pp. 26-28)

UNESCO (2010). Belém Framework for Action. *UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning* (UIL).

UNESCO (2015). Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action. UNESCO.

UNESCO (2019). 4th global report on adult learning and education: leave no one behind: participation, equity and inclusion. *UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372274*.

URT (2003). Basic Statistics in Education 1999-2003. United Republic of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, Ministry of Education and Culture.

URT (2010). Higher Education Development Programme 2010–2015. United Republic of Tanzania. Dar es Salaam: *Ministry of Education and Vocational Training*.

URT (1995). National higher education policy. United Republic of Tanzania. Dar Es Salaam: *Ministry of Science Technology and Higher Education*.

Volles, N. (2016). Lifelong learning in the EU: changing conceptualisations, actors, and policies. *Studies in higher education*, *41*(2), 343-363.

Werrema, I. J. (2012). *After 50 Years: The Promised Land is Still Too Far!* African Books Collective.

List of Tanzanian policy documents used as data

Nyerere, J. K. (1967). Education for self-reliance. *CrossCurrents*, *18*(4), 415-434.

URT (1995) Education and Training Policy. United Republic of Tanzania. *Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.*

URT (2000). Tanzania Development Vision 2025. United Republic of Tanzania. *Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.*

URT (2007) National Youth Development Policy. United Republic of Tanzania. *Ministry of Labor and Youth development.*

URT (2009). The National Strategy for Growth and Poverty Reduction. United Republic of Tanzania. Dar-es-Salaam: *Ministry of Finance.*

URT (2013) National strategy for growth and reduction of poverty II. United Republic of Tanzania. Dar-es-Salaam. *Ministry of Finance.*

URT (2014) Education and Training Policy. United Republic of Tanzania. *Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.*

Populist Right-Wing Influences on Migrant Language Provision: A Literature Review

Rachel C. Mayr (University of Hamburg)

Keywords: Adult education; Right-wing populism; Migrant language provision; Policy studies; Integration

In recent years, politics and socio-political discourse in many European countries has shifted noticeably to the right. Populist right-wing and far-right actors increasingly seek to influence integration policies as well as state and civil society institutions, including adult education providers (Hussain & Yunus, 2021; Giudici, Gruber, Schnell & Pultar, 2025). First findings on adult education and right-wing pressure show that institutions supporting vulnerable groups in literacy and basic education are particularly affected (Buddeberg et al., 2025). Language provision operates at the intersection of migration, language, and belonging, making them a focus of populist right-wing politics, for instance through public campaigns or parliamentary inquiries. Right-wing populist and far-right pressures can impact both structural conditions, such as funding and course frameworks, and everyday pedagogical practice, with educators reporting hostility, attempts to influence course content, or restrictive regulations (Berg, Jungblut & Jupskås, 2023). While discrimination and restrictive integration policies are widely discussed, the specific role of right-wing pressure is often not explicitly addressed. The aim of this paper is to investigate how right-wing populist and far-right influences affect language provision for migrants through a scoping review of the existing literature. The question guiding the review is: What is known from the existing literature about right-wing populist and right-wing extremist influences on migrant language provision?

The review seeks to identify which studies address these pressures, how they conceptualize and locate them, and what patterns emerge across national and policy contexts. The aim is to identify and map literature that attributes barriers and challenges in language provision to right-wing and far-right influences. Building on prior research on far-right pressure in adult education, the review extends the focus to all levels of language provision for migrants and refugees. Following Arksey and O'Malley (2005, pp. 21–22) reasoning to conduct a scoping review, the goal of this review is to identify research gaps in the existing literature.

The review was conducted between October and November 2025. We limited the review on English and German literature from EU member states, as these countries share broadly comparable institutional frameworks for language provision, as well as similar political dynamics related to right-wing populism. After excluding records with linguistic or thematic incapability, 10 publications remained and were included in the review. The findings of the literature review show several focal points under which far-right influences are discussed. The analysis focuses on descriptions of right-wing pressure—through funding cuts, administrative restrictions, public discourse, or curriculum framing—and their effects on institutional and pedagogical practices. Based on the ten included publications, the findings show that right-wing pressure

reshapes both policy frameworks and public discourse around language provision, with mainstream parties increasingly adopting right-wing positions. The review further identifies significant gaps in the literature regarding right-wing influence on language provision and counterstrategies. By synthesizing available evidence, the paper contributes to policy studies in adult education by highlighting how ideological contestations shape the conditions of migrant language provision.

References:

Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(1), 19–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616

Berg, A. E., Jungblut, J., & Jupskås, A. R. (2023). We don't need no education? Education policies of Western European populist radical right parties. *West European Politics, 46*(7), 1312–1342. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2177010

Buddeberg, K., Grotlüschen, A., & Cafantaris, K. (2025). Dialogue or Firewall? How the Providers of Adult Education in Germany React on Influence of the Extreme Right. *The Adult Learner*, 42–64. https://www.aontas.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/The-Adult-Learner-Journal-2025.pdf

Giudici, A., Gruber, O., Schnell, P., & Pultar, A. (2024). Far-right parties and the politics of education in Europe. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 33*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2024.2352518

Hussain, S., & Yunus, R. (2021). Right-wing populism and education: Introduction to the special section. *British Educational Research Journal, 47*(2), 247–263. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3726

Between Local Practices and European Agendas: How CPIA Principals Navigate Adult Education Policy in Italy

Erika Mazzoli, emm7052@psu.edu
Doctoral Candidate
Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Program, dual-title in Comparative and International Education
Pennsylvania State University

Conference of the ESREA Network on Policy Studies in Adult Education
Hamburg, Germany
13-15 May 2026

Introduction

Italian adult learning and education (ALE) has evolved through alternating phases of reform and inertia, shaped by shifting understandings of its social purpose (cf. De Sanctis, 1978; Marescotti, 2014; Milana & Bussi, 2024). Around the time of the Eurozone crisis (2009-2010), Italy entered a period of profound reconfiguration of its adult education landscape. Under the growing influence of lifelong learning (LLL) frameworks, oriented toward skills certification, employability, and social integration (Milana, 2017a; Walkenhorst, 2008), the establishment of the Provincial Centers for Adult Instruction (CPIAs) in 2012-2015 reflects a national effort to reorganize formal adult instruction and education at the provincial level. At the same time, this reform, namely Decree 263/2012 and the later 2015 Guidelines (Linee Guida, 2015), sought to respond to intensifying migration flows, labor-market restructuring, and persistent financial constraints (cf. Lasi, 2023). In this process, CPIAs came to embody tensions both between the 'traditional' school system and adult instruction, and more broadly, between popular, humanistic traditions of adult education and more technocratic, employability-driven rationales. A group of around 130 CPIA principals, alongside teachers and other local actors, is called upon to navigate these tensions in practice.

This paper presents preliminary findings from a multi-site narrative case study focused on CPIA principals as key policy actors. This study contributes to ALE research, critical policy studies, and comparative education research. The broader project aims to develop an empirically grounded understanding of how 8-10 CPIA principals navigate adult education policy across national and local conditions, and it is guided by two broad research questions:

1) How do CPIA principals navigate adult education policies across national and local challenges and differences?

2) How is adult education discursively constructed in the main Italian adult education policy documents?

In this paper, I will briefly outline the literature, the theoretical framework, and the methods; present preliminary findings; and conclude with a discussion of initial insights and future steps.

Literature Overview

The literature on Italian ALE and CPIAs in particular has grown in recent years. Existing studies consistently show CPIAs as highly context-dependent institutions, shaped by local socio-economic and cultural conditions (Borri & Calzone, 2019; Poliandri & Epifani, 2020). At the same time, recurring structural challenges persist, including limited physical infrastructures (Botes, 2021); lacking institutional recognition (Cacchione, 2024); and a professionally fragile teaching body (Bruni, 2021; Deiana, 2022). These conditions contribute to an uneven and still consolidating adult education system in Italy (Boffo et al., 2022; Milana & Bussi, 2024).

Research spans macro-level and CIED analyses as well as meso- and micro-level case studies from different Italian regions, resulting in a fragmented but growing body of knowledge (e.g., Guimaraes et al., 2018; Koulaouzides & Romano, 2022; Mouti & Rocca, 2023; Rehner et al., 2025; Rute et al., 2017). While European policy frameworks are frequently referenced,

relatively few studies critically examine the relationship between national and European adult education policies (e.g., Guimaraes et al., 2018; Lasi, 2023; Milana & Bussi, 2024). Within this literature, LLL is generally framed as a right (Gabrielli et al., 2020; Sibilio et al., 2021), rather than a duty to *Bildung* (Messerschmidt, 2011), or an individualistic concept (Biesta, 2018), and analyses tend to either align with or critically interrogate European policy orientations.

Despite this growing body of work, key areas remain underexplored, particularly those concerning CPIA principals. This gap is significant, given their central role in navigating the daily tensions between policy and practice. In Italy, public school principals are former teachers who successfully completed a national exam. Adopting a critical policy approach (cf. Bates, 1980), their experiences and strategies can provide insight into how Italian ALE policies are interpreted and enacted in practice, with potential relevance for broader policy debates. Eleven years after CPIAs' inception, I argue that principals' voices are key to advancing understanding of their roles and developments. Considered in international scholarship as transformative actors (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990), language policy-makers (Shohamy, 2019), and key agents shaping school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1991), CPIA principals constitute the primary units of analysis in this study.

Framework and Methods

ALE inhabits the tension between structural constraints, institutional purposes, and the worlds and words of learners and practitioners. Lima and Guimarães' (2024) multidimensional model provides a useful heuristic to capture this complexity, identifying three interwoven policy logics: the democratic-emancipatory, modernization and state-control, and human-resources-management models. Each reflects distinct orientations toward governance, participation, and ALE rationales. This model is particularly relevant for understanding CPIA policy: It can help

me trace which rationales become dominant in participants' narratives and how these rationales shape practice and priorities.

This study adopts an analytical framework that integrates the critical anthropology of education policy (CAEP), narrative inquiry, and the discourse-historical approach (DHA). Policy navigation involves processes of interpretation, enactment, and appropriation (Ball, 2015; Levinson et al., 2009; Ozga, 2000), shaped by power relations, institutional arrangements, and territorial conditions. Drawing on Levinson et al. (2018), I understand policy as "one reified instance of a broad chain of sociocultural practices" (p. 27) unfolding across formal and informal, written and unwritten domains.

I draw on Weick's (1995) concept of *sensemaking* to capture how organizational actors engage with complex and often ambiguous environments through processes grounded in identity, retrospective interpretation, and social interaction. This perspective is complemented by Lipsky's (1980) theorization on *street-level bureaucracy*, which draws attention to how policy is carried out under conditions of uncertainty, limited resources, and competing demands, where discretion becomes a structural feature of practice.

Narrative inquiry provides the epistemological grounding for examining participants' experiences as situated, temporal, and meaning-making. It approaches experience as storied and interpretive (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Riessman, 2008), allowing the study to capture how principals construct meaning through their life trajectories, dilemmas, and decisions. Finally, Wodak's (2001) DHA frames policy as a historically layered discourse, enabling analysis of how meanings, justifications, and power relations in Italian adult education policy evolved over time (Wodak et al., 2009). Within this framework, narratives are examined not only for what they

recount but also for *how* they position others, justify actions, and draw on broader policy discourses (Forchtner, 2021).

Methods

This paper draws on a selection of preliminary data collected across three CPIAs. The study combines purposeful criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) with opportunistic and adaptive sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to identify 8-10 CPIA principals. Data sources include interviews not only with CPIA principals, but also teachers, staff, university faculty, and provincial education authorities, as well as observations and document analysis.

Sampling is guided by a set of dimensions, remaining flexible to emerging field opportunities (Stake, 1995). I prioritize principals with prior leadership experience and at least four years in CPIAs (cf. Levinson et al., 2009). Where possible, sites include collaborations with local universities, given their potential for research and innovation (e.g, Bruni, 2021; D'Agostino & Sorce, 2016). Currently, I am in contact with CPIAs in Asti, Barletta-Andria-Trani, Bologna, Campobasso, Lecco, and Roma.

Data collection relies primarily on in-person semi-structured interviews, inspired by Forester's (1999) practitioner profile model, which has proven effective for exploring participants' trajectories and for eliciting critical incidents. Interviews are treated as sites of narrative construction and reflexive sensemaking (Ochs, 1994; Saint-Georges, 2012). After spending two days at each site (cf. Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990), I will conduct virtual follow-ups to deepen these perspectives.

Preliminary Findings

At this early stage, I conducted interviews with three CPIA principals (Table 1), alongside one assistant principal, one university professor, one school authority director, four CPIA teachers, and one administrative director (DSGA). Several issues identified in the literature

are reflected in participants' accounts. These include the limited institutional recognition of CPIAs, sometimes mistaken for private centers, and traces of their marginalization in earlier ministerial circulars addressed to "all schools *and* CPIAs" (principal, BAT). Experiences of discrimination from staff in host school buildings (teachers, Campobasso, and BAT) further reinforce a recurring "us/them" dichotomy across interviews. Disillusionment with the 2012 reform also emerges, which is described as "the big dream [of unifying adult instruction under CPIA, where eventually first and second level] remained separate, somehow a project that has stalled" (vice principal, Campobasso), or a "kind of . . . *hircocervus*, a sort of two-headed monster" (principal, BAT). Yet, across contexts and career stages, principals consistently express strong commitment and agency, often positioning CPIAs not as marginal institutions, but as models the broader school system should look to. In the next sections, I briefly present the three principals, and then outline some main thematic areas where local practices intersect with national and supranational policies.

Table 1: Participating CPIA principals

CPIA Name	Location	Area	Sex	Career Stage	Years at CPIA	Prior Principal Experience	Academic Background	Uni Collab
CPIA "F. De Andrè"	Lecco (Lombardia)	North	M	Late	12	Territorial Permanent Center (CTP); Comprehensive school	Primary education; humanities; philosophy	No
CPIA "Maestro Manzi"	Campobasso (Molise)	Center	F	Mid	5	None	Psychology	Yes
CPIA "Gino Strada"	BAT (Puglia)	South	M	Late	6	High school (Liceo)	Humanities; theology	No

Lecco's principal is the most experienced among those interviewed. His story and anecdotes reveal a sustained engagement with figures, politics, and institutional growth at the regional and national level. As he reflects on longstanding national rigidity toward CPIA demands, his narrative consistently returns to an expansion-oriented vision. "I like building things," he says, repeating the verb nine times during our conversation. Over the decades, he promoted and led a national CPIA ICT network focused on training and creating resources for teachers of all schools. A representative quote capturing his background and his precision with figures is:

> One hundred and thirty [CPIA] schools out of 8,000 are negligible, it is as if they did not exist; as if we were merely an experimental attempt. Except that adult education has existed since *Cuore*[1], it is not something that was invented in the last ten years. Adult education has always existed in Italy, so much so that . . . it is described in *Cuore*. We are talking about a school of the 1880s!

His account emphasizes the historical dimension of Italian ALE.

The principal of CPIA Campobasso is a mid-career leader with a background in psychotherapy. Her narrative of the CPIA draws on the semantic fields of distress and trauma, and is marked by recurring references to war, guerrilla, struggle, and threat, suggesting a continuous effort to confront challenges. Her account is permeated by a sustained sense that there is always "tanto da fare" [a lot to do], coupled with references to concrete accomplishments, such as the establishment of their new autonomous location in Campobasso. The CPIA emerges in her narrative as a young school type and a stronghold of legality. She started collaborations with the faculty of economics. Overall, her account conveys an ongoing

[1] A classic Italian children's novel written by Edmondo De Amicis (1895) presented as the diary of a young schoolboy.

effort to cope with the policy framework, endure its constraints, and create locally grounded opportunities for students.

In the province of Barletta-Andria-Trani (BAT), the principal has six years of experience leading that CPIA. Prior to this, he served as principal of a classical high school, worked for three years as a councilor for culture and public education, and teaches theology at Facoltà Teologica Pugliese. Reflecting on his transition to the CPIA, he emphasizes that "it was a deliberate choice. I often joke that, as the grandson of an illiterate farm laborer and the son of a migrant worker in Germany, becoming a CPIA principal was almost inevitable." His practice is characterized by regular staff coordination and communication with colleagues and students. This dynamism is accompanied by a strong passion, which permeates his narrative and appears to sustain the intensity of everyday work. As he puts it, "I believe the principal plays a political role. So yes, if it is true, as the saying goes, that a fish rots from the head, it may also be true that it can give off a good scent from the head." Particularly for a CPIA, having good leadership is crucial.

CPIA's Goals

According to Italian Decree 263/2012, CPIAs are designed to address multiple functions, including Italian language and literacy, adult basic and secondary education, and LLL tailored to local needs: "They are organized so as to establish close coordination with local authorities and with the world of work and professions" (Decree 263, 2012).

From the accounts collected so far, principals' visions significantly shape the scope of CPIA's territorial influence. While coordination with local authorities and the labor market seems a priority, it is framed in terms of flexibility rather than credentialism: "Not so that we become a 'diploma factory,' but so that we can be truly flexible, . . . to respond to a changing

labor market, changing needs, and everything that comes with it" (principal, BAT). In Campobasso, similarly, the principal emphasizes CPIA's role in preventing delinquency and as a bridge to the job market, while noting weak institutional links with upper secondary and vocational pathways.

Across interviews, CPIAs emerge as civic, relational, and emancipatory spaces. Principals stress that adult education should not "uncritically accept everything" but foster dialogue: "If *certain issues* [gender issues, verbal violence] are not discussed there … where would that happen?" (principal, Lecco). This orientation also translates into finding solutions to offer morning classes to accommodate mothers, who "experience [it] . . . as a moment of personal emancipation" (principal, Lecco).

At the same time, some interviewees raise concerns about the distance of policy-makers and the weight of bureaucracy, described as "bureau-archy" (teacher, BAT) on school functioning. School, in turn, is described as embedded in lived experience: "an element within time, within the space of life today. *Hic et nunc*, that is, here and now" (teacher, BAT). Overall, interviewees seem to embrace policy-defined objectives while simultaneously developing context-specific responses that sustain opportunities for democratic engagement and emancipatory practices.

CPIAs and Employability

As noted in the preamble (items 29-30), Decree 263/2012 explicitly references European recommendations on key competences for LLL (2006) and on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for LLL (2008). While European policy is visible in national policy documents, it is less explicit in interviews, with one notable exception: a faculty member in Campobasso frames ALE as a right to "education for life: to live better …. A person … whose

education has not been *upgraded*… may not even be autonomous" (faculty professor, Campobasso). In collaboration with local CPIAs, she participates in an inter-regional project promoted by the Ministry of Labor against illegal forms of work targeting migrants, grounded in the dual objective of ensuring safe access to the labor market and fostering a more responsible community by equipping the students with tools and skills to read the world around them. They also collaborate on a European project on reskilling vulnerable individuals titled Rescale, "precisely to convey how it is possible to 'climb back up' through education, so that vulnerable people, those outside the labor market . . . can be reintegrated" (faculty professor, Campobasso). In Molise, a region characterized by demographic decline, limited industrial development, and a fragile labor market, institutional actors serve as key intermediaries linking education, employability, and social inclusion, translating European policy orientations into locally grounded practices.

Territorial Networks

Article 2 of Decree 263/2012 states that CPIAs may:

> Expand the training offer within the scope of their autonomy and within the limits of the available resources. . . and within the framework of agreements with local authorities and other public and private entities, with particular reference to training structures accredited by the regions.

All three principals smiled when asked about differences with other types of schools. As the Lecco principal noted: "There is a greater dimension of networked work, because adult education has to be able to relate to all the agencies in the area." CPIA principals normally maintain relationships with a wide range of actors, such as industrial and craft associations, services supporting women victims of trafficking, residential care facilities, third-sector cooperatives, public health, regional authorities, the Ministry of Justice for prison education, to

name a few. This “gives a different scope” to school management, opening up “much wider perspectives,” envisioning it as “an immense open field around us” (principal, Lecco). At the same time, however, this openness is hard to sustain across the territories they serve: “How am I supposed to deal with 88 municipalities? We went from 4 delivery sites to 27, but I will never manage to have 88.” I was not surprised when a principal in a revealing slip referred to himself as a “mayor” rather than a “principal.”

In this sense, CPIA principals act as institutional brokers, advancing their schools’ interests while responding to students’ needs and broader community wellbeing. Interviews point to sustained efforts to expand vocational opportunities, particularly through EU-funded programs, such as courses for pizza makers, electricians, and nail artists, investments in workshops, science labs, and even a hydroponic greenhouse. As one administrative director put it, they are “constantly looking for solutions to enable everyone to complete their educational pathways . . . with the awareness that we really could, and still can, act as a bridge between school and the labor market” (DSGA, BAT).

What I am Learning

This early stage of fieldwork provides a space for reflexive adjustment ahead of subsequent visits. The research unfolds as a collective and political process, in which exchanges with participants generate reflection at institutional, academic, and personal levels. Arranging meetings with diverse actors, including university faculty and education authorities, within a short timeframe relies on principals’ active and generous support. At the same time, meeting participants in person, even briefly and in their own environments, grounds policy analysis in lived practice and recognizes their experiences as situated and meaningful.

Participants’ accounts often extend beyond the interview questions, opening reflections on broader issues, such as the meaning of LLL as a duty or a right, or the relationship between

instruction and education. Interviews thus become sites where narratives are actively constructed (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), shaped by participants' agendas and reflexive positioning (Hiller & Diluzio, 2004; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As interviews privilege the flow of ideas over carefully weighed words, I am learning to attune more closely to patterns across speech, embodied cues, and the material environment, as mutually constitutive elements.

While broader dynamics such as neoliberalism and globalization are not explicitly named, they remain perceptible between the lines. Anecdotes ground policy enactment at the micro level, pointing to the need to further explore connections to macro and mega levels, including global conflicts, financial instability, and phenomena related to the so-called crises of the Anthropocene (Silova, 2021).

Discussion

Considering these early findings, my impression is that CPIA policy and participants' narratives tell somewhat different stories about CPIA goals and functioning. The Europeanization of ALE policy, understood as complementary to globalization and informed by neoliberal orientations (Dale & Robertson, 2009), has been a central driver in the evolution toward CPIAs (Milana, 2017b; Milana & Bussi, 2024). While CPIA policy formally reflects European recommendations, they continue to operate through governance mechanisms rooted in the traditional school system (Koulaouzides & Romano, 2022). Nonetheless, CPIAs' field of action extends beyond schooling to vocational, community learning, and popular culture. Within resource constraints, CPIA principals are *building* their own policies and developing locally grounded counterstrategies, such as accepting former students as babysitter volunteers, pursuing interregional agreements, and partnering with vocational centers, thereby compensating for

structural limitations. These practices are informed by their visions of ALE, shaped by their biographies and diverse professional and cultural backgrounds.

Returning to Lima and Guimarães' (2024) model, different policy rationales appear to coexist: employability-driven logics intersect with democratic and emancipatory practices, rather than fully displacing them. This suggests that principals' practices are not only shaped by policy agendas but are also actively reinterpreted through complex, situated forms of agency.

Conclusions

Bringing principals' narratives into policy analysis suggests how national and European ALE policies may take on diverse, locally grounded meanings in practice. As noted earlier, CPIAs sit at the intersection of migration, labor-market change, and financial constraints; this study offers an initial glimpse into how CPIA principals experience and negotiate these tensions. Rather than taking policy as given, they appear to interpret and adapt it, building territorial networks where employability-oriented logics coexist with civic and emancipatory aims.

As fieldwork continues, I aim to learn how CPIA principals make sense of and work with policy in their everyday practice, triangulating these interpretations with policy documents and institutional texts referenced by participants. Developing a robust empirical base and extending the analysis across sites and regions, while situating findings within local, historical, and socio-economic contexts, will enable more systematic comparison and a deeper understanding of CPIA principals' practices.

References

Ball, S. J. (2015). What is policy? 21 years later: Reflections on the possibilities of policy research. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *36*(3), 306–313. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1015279

Bates, R. J. (1980, August). *The function of educational administration in the processes of cultural transmission*. Conference on the Origins and Operations of Educational Systems, International Sociological Association. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED199911

Biesta, G. (2018). Interrupting the politics of learning. In K. Illeris, *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists ... In Their Own Words*. Taylor & Francis Group. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=5323092

Boffo, V., Del Gobbo, G., & Torlone, F. (Eds.). (2022). *Educazione degli Adulti: Politiche, percorsi, prospettive: Studi in onore di Paolo Federighi [Adult education: policies, pathways, perspectives. Studies in honor of Paolo Federighi]*. Firenze University Press. https://doi.org/10.36253/979-12-215-0006-6

Borri, M., & Calzone, S. (2019). *L'istruzione degli adulti in Italia. I CPIA attraverso la voce dei loro attori [Adult education in Italy: CPIAs through its actors' voices]*. Edizioni ETS. https://www.edizioniets.com/scheda.asp?n=9788846755711

Botes, G. (2021). La formazione e l'aggiornamento professionale dei docenti: Risorse strategiche per un'istruzione degli adulti di qualità [Teacher training and professional development: Strategic resources for high-quality adult education]. *Epale Journal on Adult Learning and Continuing Education*, *9*.

Bruni, F. (2021). Teaching methods, teaching training, and adult education. A survey in the Molise Region. In *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica "Reinventing Education," Vol. I: Citizenship, Work and the Global Age* (pp. 1011–1020). Associazione "Per Scuola Democratica."

Cacchione, A. (2024). *La scuola dimenticata [The forgotten school]*. Edizioni Nuova Cultura. https://www.perlego.com/book/4361093/la-scuola-dimenticata-analisi-del-sistema-educativo-degli-adulti-in-italia-pdf

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative Inquiry. In J. L. Green, J. Green, G. Camilli, P. B. Elmore, & P. Elmore, *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research*. Routledge. (280676). https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=ea780a16-5536-3eca-9a3f-5d469e0fa0db

D'Agostino, M., & Sorce, G. (2016). *Nuovi migranti e nuova didattica. Esperienze al CPIA Palermo 1 [New migrants and new teaching approaches: Experiences at CPIA Palermo 1]*. Università di Palermo, Scuola italiana per Stranieri. https://www.unipa.it/strutture/scuolaitalianastranieri/.content/documenti/ItaStra_Strumenti-e-ricerche-6.pdf

Dale, R., & Robertson, S. L. (Eds.). (2009). *Globalisation and europeanisation in education*. Symposium Books.

De Amicis, E., & Hapgood, I. F. (1895). *Cuore: An Italian schoolboy's journal, a book for boys*. T.Y. Crowell & co.

De Sanctis, F. M. (1978). *L'educazione degli adulti in Italia 1848-1976: Dal "diritto di adunarsi" alle "150 ore" [Adult education in Italy, 1848–1976: from the "right to assemble" to the "150 hours" reforms]*. Riuniti.

Deal, T. E., & Peterson, K. D. (1991). *The principal's role in shaping school culture*. U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Programs for the Improvement of Practice.

Decree 263, 263, Italian Presidential Decree (2012).

Deiana, I. (2022). Alcune riflessioni sui docenti che insegnano nei “percorsi di alfabetizzazione e apprendimento della lingua italiana” [Reflections on teachers working in the “literacy and Italian language learning pathways”]. *Italiano LinguaDue*, *14*, 96–115. https://doi.org/10.54103/2037-3597/18160

Forchtner, B. (2021). Introducing ‘Narrative in Critical Discourse Studies.’ *Critical Discourse Studies*, *18*(3), 304–313. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2020.1802765

Forester, J. (1999). *The deliberative practitioner: Encouraging participatory planning processes* [Electronic resource]. MIT Press. https://ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/login?url=http://www.netLibrary.com/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=16099

Gabrielli, S., Benvenuto, G., Sposetti, P., & Szpunar, G. (2020). I CPIA come enti istituzionali di inclusione: Un caso di studio a Roma [CPIAs as institutional entities of inclusion: a case study in Rome]. In *Osservatorio romano sulle migrazioni*. Roma. https://iris.uniroma3.it/handle/11590/473407

Guimaraes, P., Lucio-Villegas, E., & Mayo, P. (2018). Southern-European signposts for critical popular adult education: Italy, Portugal and Spain. *Compare-a Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *48*(1), 56–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1283584

Hiller, H. H., & Diluzio, L. (2004). The interviewee and the research interview: Analysing a neglected dimension in research. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, *41*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-618X.2004.tb02167.x

Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1995). *The active interview* [Electronic resource]. SAGE. https://ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/login?url=http://SRMO.sagepub.com/view/the-active-interview/SAGE.xml

Koulaouzides, G., & Romano, A. (2022). Una faccia, una razza: Similarities, differences, and parallels in adult education policy development in Greece and Italy. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, *18*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.22230/ijepl.2022v18n1a1203

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed). Sage Publications.

Lasi, F. (2023). *Educazione degli adulti e sviluppo di comunità. Una etnografia delle politiche in un CPIA. [Adult education and community development. An ethnography of policies in a CPIA]* [Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Verona]. https://iris.univr.it/handle/11562/1104866

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1990). Transformational Leadership: How Principals Can Help Reform School Cultures. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *1*(4), 249–280. https://doi.org/10.1080/0924345900010402

Levinson, B., Sutton, M., & Winstead, T. (2009). Education Policy as a Practice of Power: Theoretical Tools, Ethnographic Methods, Democratic Options. *Educational Policy*, *23*(6), 767–795. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904808320676

Levinson, B., Winstead, T., & Sutton, M. (2018). Theoretical foundations for a critical anthropology of education policy. In A. E. Castagno & T. L. McCarty (Eds.), *The anthropology of education policy: Ethnographic inquiries into policy as sociocultural process*. Routledge.

Lima, L. C., & Guimarães, P. (2024). Revisiting a theoretical model to understand adult learning and education policies. In M. Milana, P. Rasmussen, & M. Bussi, *Research Handbook on Adult Education Policy*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=31507901

Linee Guida, 130 Gazzetta Ufficiale (2015). Linee guida per il passaggio al nuovo ordinamento a sostegno dell'autonomia organizzativa e didattica dei Centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti [Guidelines for the transition to the new system in support of the organizational and instructional autonomy of the Provincial Centers for Adult Education]

Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Marescotti, E. (2014). The formal system of adult education in Italy from CTPs (1997) to CPIAs (2013/2014): An inside view of the situation. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *4*(12). https://www.ijhssnet.com/journal/index/2836

Messerschmidt, A. (2011). Weiter bilden? Anmerkungen zum lebenslangen Lernen aus erwachsenenbildnerischer und bildungstheoretischer Perspektive [Further education? Reflections on lifelong learning from adult education and educational theory perspectives]. In Kommission Sozialpädagogik, *Bildung des Effective Citizen. Sozialpädagogik auf dem Weg zu einem neuen Sozialentwurf.* Juventa Verl.

Milana, M. (2017a). *Global Networks, Local Actions: Rethinking Adult Education Policy in the 21st Century*. Taylor & Francis Group. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=4756138

Milana, M. (2017b). Italy and the schooling of immigrants. In M. Milana, *Global Networks, Local Actions: Rethinking Adult Education Policy in the 21st Century* (pp. 186–210).

Taylor & Francis Group. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=4756138

Milana, M., & Bussi, M. (2024). The evolution of the Italian adult learning system (1990s–2020s): Policy fragmentation, institutional dynamics, and European influence. In M. Milana, P. Rasmussen, & M. Bussi (Eds.), *Research handbook on adult education policy*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Sage.

Mouti, A., & Rocca, L. (2023). Linguistic integration of adult migrants in Greece and Italy: Language requirements and learning opportunities in L2 Greek and L2 Italian. *Social Sciences*, *12*(12), 668. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12120668

Ochs, E. (1994). Stories that step into the future. In D. Biber & E. Finegan (Eds.), *Sociolinguistic perspectives on register*. Oxford University Press.

Ozga, J. (2000). *Policy research in educational settings: Contested terrain*. Open University Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed). Sage Publications.

Poliandri, D., & Epifani, G. (2020). *Scoprire i Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti: Contesti, ambienti, processi. Dati dal Questionario CPIA Valu.E e dal Rapporto di autovalutazione [Discovering the Provincial Centers for Adult Education: Contexts, environments, and processes. Data from the CPIA Valu.E questionnaire and the self-evaluation report]*. INVALSI.

Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. (2006). In *OJ L* (Vol. 394). http://data.europa.eu/eli/reco/2006/962/oj/eng

Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (Text with EEA relevance). (2008). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32008H0506%2801%29&qid=1777362256696

Rehner, K., Ippolito, J., Lasan, I., Forget, G., Gouveia, C., Jones, S., & Liu, Y. (2025). Adult migrants' formal and informal language learning opportunities: Availability, choice, and social integration. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, *81*(1), 25–47. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr-2023-0075

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage Publications.

Rute, R., Bani, B., Camilloni, F., Lizon, L., Cavaca, M., Sinha, P., Kandera, P., & Egetenmeyer, R. (2017). Participation and non-participation in adult education and learning: A comparative study between Portugal, Italy, Hungary, and India. In R. Egetenmeyer, S. Schmidt-Lauff, & V. Boffo (Eds.), *Adult learning and education in international contexts: Future challenges for its professionalization: Comparative perspectives from the 2016 Wurzburg Winter School*. Peter Lang.

Saint-Georges, I. D. (2012). Anticipatory Discourse. In *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0032

Shohamy, E. (2019). School principals as language policy makers. In *The Business of Words*. Routledge.

Sibilio, R., Buonanno, P., & Falzarano, A. (2021). Le reti territoriali per l'apprendimento permanente tra strategia e operatività [Territorial networks for lifelong learning between strategy and operations]. In *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica "Reinventing Education," Vol. I: Citizenship, Work and the Global Age* (pp. 1079–1089). Associazione "Per Scuola Democratica."

Silova, I. (2021). Facing the Anthropocene: Comparative Education as Sympoiesis. *Comparative Education Review*, *65*(4), 587–616. https://doi.org/10.1086/716664

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications.

Walkenhorst, H. (2008). Explaining change in EU education policy. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *15*(4), 567–587. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760801996741

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Sage Publications.

Wodak, R., Cillia, R. de, Reisigl, M., & Liebhart, K. (2009). *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (2nd ed). Edinburgh University Press. https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=a6444e97-d03a-3e38-8fc6-59ef7c18a35c

Wodak, R., Meyer, M., & Wodak, R. (2001). The Discourse-Historical Approach. In *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 63–94). SAGE Publications, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857028020

The Erasmus+ programme – impact on participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement in adult education in Portugal and Slovenia

Borut Mikulec, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)

Paula Guimarães, University of Lisbon (Portugal)

Keywords: adult education, citizenship education, Erasmus+, Portugal, Slovenia

Aims/objectives: This paper examines the Erasmus+ Adult Education (AE) programme and its connection to participation in democratic life (e.g. voting, joining community organisations, volunteering, peaceful protests), common values (i.e. human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and respect for human rights) and civic engagement (i.e. participation in a society) (European Commission, 2024). It is based on data collected on a study on impact under development by National Erasmus+ agencies in several countries. Previous research has shown that European Union (EU) AE policy has primarily strengthened economic and vocational perspectives on AE (e.g. Field, 2018; Holford & Milana, 2023; Lima & Guimaraes, 2024) on one side. On the other, studies examining the Erasmus+ programme in AE have shown that although the Erasmus+ supports social goals and counterbalances the dominant vocational orientation of European AE policy (Buiskol et al., 2024; Mikulec & Kristl, 2025), it has the least impact on participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement, and thus on the promotion of active citizenship. Our main objective is therefore to investigate how the Erasmus+ does (or does not) contribute to the promotion of active citizenship in two Member States – Portugal and Slovenia – by offering opportunities to adults to participate in democratic life, social and civic engagement through non-formal learning activities.

Conceptual framework: Researchers conceptualise citizenship education differently – some distinguish between socialising or transformative citizenship practises (e.g. Wildemeersch & Fejes, 2018) others between learning *about*, *through* or *for* citizenship (e.g. Johnston, 2007). Therefore, citizenship is a dynamic, contextual, contested and multidimensional concept. In our work, we build on the conceptual understanding of four dimensions of citizenship and citizenship education developed by Schugurensky (2010): Citizenship as status (legal membership), Citizenship as identity (belonging), Citizenship as civic virtues (values), Citizenship as agency (being in action) that promotes active citizenship by developing “responsible”, “participatory”, or “justice-oriented” citizens.

Methods & data sources: The impact is analysed at the meso and micro level in both countries. It will use mixed-methods research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which includes both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data, targeting AE beneficiaries participating in Erasmus+ projects in the period 2021-2027, will be collected via an online survey. Qualitative data will be collected as follows: (1) document analysis of existing sources (database of Erasmus+ project results, project reports); (2) focus group interviews (director, Erasmus+ coordinators, professional staff) with selected participating AE organisations; (3) interviews with adult learners participating in Erasmus+.

Results/conclusions: This work is in progress. Main empirical work is to be carried out by February 2026. However, we anticipate that it will contribute to knowledge creation by showing (1) whether the Erasmus+ programme supports active citizenship in practice as defined by the Programme and, if so, (2) which dimension of citizenship the programme supports the most.

Relevance to PSAE: It is of utmost importance to understand how European non-vocational AE policy can support adults to participate in democratic life and social and civic engagement in the Member States. Very few studies have been conducted on non-formal adult education, both in the EU and in the two countries under analysis.

References

Buiskool, B.-J., Krichewsky-Wegener, L., Erckrath, M. (2024). *Comparative research report, first survey round 2024: Transnational analysis of the impact of Erasmus+ on the Adult Education Sector*. Ockham IPS.

Creswell, J. M., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.

EC. (2024). *Erasmus+ programme guide*. European Commission.

Field, J. (2018). Comparative issues and perspectives in adult education and training. In B. Bartram (Ed.), *International and comparative education: Contemporary issues and debates* (pp. 100-112). Routledge.

Holford, J., & Milana, M. (2023). The European Union and Lifelong Learning Policy. In K. Evans, W. On Lee, J. Markowitsch, & M. Zukas (Eds.), *Third International Handbook of Lifelong Learning* (pp. 499-522). Springer.

Johnston, R. (2007). A framework for analysing and developing adult learning for active citizenship. In D. Wildemeersch, V. Stroobants, & M. Bron Jr. (Eds.), *Active Citizenship and Multiple Identities in Europe* (pp. 47-66). Peter Lang.

Lima, L. C., & Guimarães, P. (2024). Revisiting a theoretical model to understand adult learning and education policies. In M. Milana, P. Rasmussen, & M. Bussi (Eds.), *Research handbook on adult education policy* (pp. 25–40). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Mikulec, B., & Kristl, N. (2025). The impact of the Erasmus+ programme on adult education in Slovenia. *Int Rev Educ, 71*, 631–654. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-025-10138-5

Schugurensky, D. (2010). Citizenship and Immigrant Education. In P. Peterson, E. Baker, & B. McGaw (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education. Third Edition* (pp. 115-119). Elsevier Ltd.

Wildemeersch, D., & Fejes, A. (2018). Editorial Citizenship and the crisis of democracy: What role can adult education play in matters of public concern?. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *9*(2), 133–137. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.relae16

Authors: Terhi Myller, D.Soc.Sc. Principal Lecturer at Karelia UAS, terhi.myller@karelia.fi
Heli Makkonen, D.Ed. Principal Lecturer at Karelia UAS, heli.makkonen@karelia.fi

Abstract

By applying a practice-critical analysis and critical geragogy approach, this paper examines the meanings that adults aged 55+ in Finland assign to lifelong learning. Older adults' experiences of lifelong learning have received little attention in research, underscoring the importance of making them visible. Critical geragogy refers, in this respect, to older learners' lived experiences in shaping lifelong learning possibilities, and it is understood as a set of transformative structures shaped over time and situated within specific political, educational and historical contexts. The guiding question of this paper is: What meanings do older Finnish adults assign to lifelong learning and what are the key elements that support age-inclusive lifelong learning based on their experiences? The participants, older learners aged 55+, in rural and urban groups, n= 19 in total, participated in the co-designing, piloting and evaluation process of age-inclusive lifelong learning and micro-credentials facilitated by the educators of Karelia University of Applied Sciences during Erasmus+ -funded AliVe project (2023–2026). Mindmaps, notes, and transcriptions from workshops were analysed abductively. The findings indicate that 1) meaning of the learning content and mode, 2) learning environment as an engine to empower, 3) societal structures supporting and challenging lifelong learning given by older learners, illustrate critical geragogy supporting in facilitating age-inclusive learning, learning environment shaping, and revealing of structural mismatches. In conclusion, education policies tend to frame lifelong learning primarily in terms of continuous education and extended working lives, and its deeper meanings and lived significance for older adults remains scarce.

Key words: Age-inclusive lifelong learning, critical geragogy, practice-critical approach

Age-friendly society calls for lifelong learning and critical geragogy- practice-critical findings from Finland from 55+ learners' experiences

Introduction

By applying a practice-critical analysis and a critical geragogical approach, this paper examines the meanings that adults aged 55+ in Finland assign to lifelong learning. Critical geragogy emphasises older learners' lived experiences (Stončikaité, 2023; Creech & Hallam, 2015) in shaping lifelong learning possibilities. In this respect, lifelong learning is understood as a set of transformative structures shaped over time and situated within specific political, educational and historical contexts. Lifelong learning is understood more, and deeper, than the self-directed process of learning (see Howard Morris et al., 2024.) In line with this view, the focus of this paper is on older persons' own conceptions and lived experiences of lifelong learning in Finland, taking into account how these perspectives support and/or challenge prevailing policy framings. In this paper, lifelong learning refers to nonformal and informal learning (e.g., Hager, 2021).

This paper draws on the conceptions and experiences as they emerged in the AliVe project (*Age-Inclusive Lifelong Learning: Micro-credentials and Guidelines*, 2023–2026), an Erasmus+ funded European initiative in which four higher education institutions from Austria, Ireland, Finland, and the Czech Republic co-designed, piloted, evaluated, and formulated a methodological roadmap for creating micro-credentials *with* and *for* learners

aged 55+ (IARA, 2026). Based on the Finnish participants' experiences during the AliVe project, this paper synthesises the key insights.

In an ideal world, societies are age-friendly and support older adults' lifelong learning in ways that respond to individual needs, including accessibility, intergenerational engagement, and participation in diverse learning opportunities (WHO, 2024). According to UNECE (2026) and WHO (2007), an age-friendly society aims to be one in which older people can live and participate fully, regardless of age or functional ability. Such societies promote health, well-being, and independence while addressing the physical, social and economic needs of older adults. Age-inclusive elements include accessible transportation, safe and affordable housing, opportunities for social interaction, appropriate social and healthcare services, and respect for the rights and dignity of older people (WHO, 2007; UNECE, 2026). However, in practice, the goals of age-friendly societies do not meet all older adults, and, for example, the participation of older adults is fragmented (e.g., Torku et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important toto respond to calls for examining and developing lifelong learning for older adults, as lifelong learning plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' health, wellbeing, and economic status across the life course including later years (United Nations, 2023).

In recent decades, lifelong learning has faced persistent barriers, such as socioeconomic disparities (Gibney et al., 2018), ageism, and digital exclusion (e.g., Mihevc et al., 2024). The gap between available educational provision and the diverse needs of older learners (e.g., Gierzewski & Klukowicz, 2021) along with unequal access to learning opportunities (Kleemola et al., 2025), challenge the access of age-inclusive lifelong learning, and deepen the polarisation between older learners (e.g., Bauldry et al., 2024). This contributes to inequalities between highly educated individuals and those with limited educational attainment (Patzina, 2021) and between working-aged people and retirees. Furthermore, research literature concerning lifelong learning focuses on career continuums and employability issues (e.g., Ward et al., 2023; Howard Morris et al., 2024).

Lifelong learning is often framed as a means of strengthening older adults' participation, citizenship, and social justice (Howard Morris et al., 2024). A central question, however, concerns how social justice is expected to be realised related to lifelong learning and where responsibility of fostering lifelong learning lies: is it primarily an individual obligation, or a shared responsibility of communities and society (see e.g., Hager, 2021)? Addressing social justice in lifelong learning is essential for clarifying its broader purpose. Additionally, in practice, social justice within lifelong learning remains unevenly realised and constrained by structural challenges, while older adults' voices are not always sufficiently heard. Advancing social justice requires, therefore, learning environments and practices grounded in reciprocity, dialogue, and the recognition of experiential knowledge. (See Hafford-Letchfield, 2010.) At the same time, a holistic understanding of lifelong learning, encompassing formal, non-formal, and informal dimensions, is often not reflected in policy-level guidelines (see Howard Morris et al., 2024). Moreover, lifelong learning among older adults has received relatively limited attention in research, particularly from the perspective of learners' own experiences.

In Finland, like in many other Western societies, lifelong learning is a part of formal educational programmes (UNESCO, 2025), but in concrete practices, there is variation between actual provision and possibilities of lifelong learning. For example, the 2019–2022 Finnish Government Programme highlighted older people as a resource for society, and the aim of the programme was to promote age-friendliness. The 2023–2027 Government Programme aligned to support the employment of older workers, but otherwise the entries

concerning older people do not emphasise active agency; instead, the position of older people can primarily be interpreted as recipients of care. These are important policy alignments that shape the way older people are seen and officially positioned in society. At the same time, these alignments maintain or renew the stereotypes of an ageing population. As the current provision of lifelong learning possibilities in Finland do not recognise the diversity of older learners and the benefits for wellbeing and intergenerational aspects (see Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019), the need for examining the phenomenon of lifelong learning from the older learners' perspective is needed.

In order to respond to this challenge, the aim of this paper is to explore the meanings that older Finnish adults assign to lifelong learning and to identify key aspects of critical geragogy for supporting age-inclusive lifelong learning based on their lived experiences. The guiding question of this paper is:

- What meanings do older Finnish adults assign to lifelong learning and what are the key elements that support age-inclusive lifelong learning based on their experiences?

The produced knowledge is possible to be used, for example, in research, education, and developing the structures and policies of HEIs and lifelong learning provision.

Critical geragogy

The pedagogy for older learners is often discussed under the concept of geragogy (Formosa, 2012), which refers to the consideration of holistic learning environment and the physical, social, and emotional needs of older learners (e.g., Gates & Wilson-Menzfeld, 2022; Formosa, 2012). The focus of geragogy is on designing learning and educational processes for and with older people. In this paper, the concept of critical geragogy (Formosa, 2012; Stončikaité, 2023) is used, which refers to the pedagogical approach that dismantles hierarchies between a teacher and a learner, and recognises older learners' active role in their studies and learning processes. In critical geragogy, ageing is understood as a phase of creativity, meaning-making, and self-realisation rather than only adjustment and decline. Critical geragogy draws on critical theory and highlights power, agency, equality, and learners' lived experiences. (Stončikaité, 2023.) A foundational principle of this approach is that the life experience and insights of older learners are acknowledged and valued (Creech & Hallam, 2015).

Additionally, a core component of critical geragogy is identifying and challenging ageism, and stereotypes linked to older learners. A typical stereotype is that older adults are not seen as potential learners in the first place. Stereotypical views can prevent recognising the meanings of older adults' learning (Hafford-Letchfield, 2010; Ogg, 2021) or even restrict participation and experiences of inclusion (Gonçalves et al. 2024). For example, Gonçalves et al. (2024) and Montayre et al. (2023) have noted that ageism may appear at the societal level as well as in higher education practices. In order to respond to these concerns, critical geragogy focuses on recognising challenges, beliefs, assumptions, practices, and structures related to ageing, to support older learners developing their agencies. It aims to offer resources for purposeful collective action. (Creech & Hallam, 2015.)

Prior research also highlights structural and pedagogical barriers that can limit older adults' access to learning: physical and cognitive constraints, inaccessible campuses and teaching arrangements, costs, geographical distance, schedules and mobility, as well as rigid

administrative practices (Gonçalves et al., 2024). Digital exclusion, elitism, and social selectivity can shape who benefits from educational opportunities and who is left outside (Gonçalves et al., 2024). Addressing the digital divide is, therefore, not only a technical question but also one of equality and participation (Rasi-Heikkinen & Doh, 2023). According to Creech and Hallam (2015), it is important that participants can feel more able to contribute their own ideas, take on leadership roles in participation, formulating the learning situation as a learning community, characterised by collective exploration.

The link between lifelong learning and wellbeing (eg. Narushima, 2013), is widely recognised, which is often associated with positive or active ageing (see WHO, 2007). Active ageing refers, as its simplest, to the activity of individuals and policies on highlighting active ageing, but no universal definition exists. The concept has received criticism about its rhetoric and connotations related to, for example, emphasising productivity. (Boudiny, 2013.) However, e.g. Brook and Booth (2022) emphasise that critical geragogy provides a different lens on reviewing lifelong learning and wellbeing. As so, the foundation is not a ready-made, active participant, but identification and appreciating the needs of participants. For example, an accessible environment focused on and designed for participants with Parkinson disease, supported them to move in a novel, unimaged way (Brook & Booth, 2022).

Framing of active ageing focusing on individual activity does not necessarily attend structures or groups who are marginalised or in vulnerable positions, and they may implicitly define what kind of ageing is desirable or "good" (e.g., Stončikaitė, 2023). Taking together, the idea of critical geragogy is to not narrow or categorise older adults; instead, it considers diverse actors and starting points and takes their needs seriously (e.g., Brook & Booth, 2022; Stončikaitė, 2023). Overall, educational inclusion in later life is not self-evident; it requires actively dismantling ageism, removing structural barriers, adopting a genuinely inclusive pedagogy, and closer collaboration between education policy and social policy (Gonçalves et al., 2024).

Based on the brief literature review, critical geragogy offers tools to analyse, plan and organise lifelong learning opportunities for and with older adults by taking into account older learners' perceived conceptions and experiences, as well as broader structural conditions and potential mismatches between the provision of lifelong learning and lived realities. However, this holistic approach may not reach all marginalised groups or individuals who are not proactive in engaging with the lifelong learning opportunities available, such as micro-credentials offered by educational institutions. This highlights the need to consider not only pedagogical frameworks but also accessibility and removing structural barriers when designing inclusive lifelong learning policies and practices.

Methods and data

Design

This paper applies a practice-critical approach (Virolainen et al., 2024) which enables emancipatory knowledge formulation, revealing the underpinning assumptions and norms behind lifelong learning practices. Practice-critical reflection is a way to examine both research and practical insights from new perspectives. It requires a curious, inquiry-oriented stance and, for example, making explicit values that guide decisions. A critical lens helps formulate new questions, look beyond surface-level implementation, and revisit earlier choices; it also directs attention to how actions and outcomes appear from different

stakeholders' perspectives and encourages asking who is included and who may remain unheard (Fook & Gardner, 2008, 166–7). Applying the practice-critical approach (Virolainen et al., 2024), the guiding idea of the knowledge formulation is to provide outlooks for renewed educational practices, based on the findings produced in AliVe project. As the participants accepted the scientific reuse of the data, the data, including mind maps, notes and transcripts from workshops provided by them, was used as a source to examine the meanings Finnish adults assign to lifelong learning and descriptions of lifelong learning.

Participants and knowledge production

The participants, older learners from 55 years up to 85 years old, in rural and urban groups, (n= 19 in total), were knowledge formulators and actors of the AliVe project in Finland during 2024-2026. They participated in the co-designing, piloting and evaluation process of age-inclusive lifelong learning and micro-credentials facilitated by the educators and researchers of Karelia University of Applied Sciences (see Myller & Makkonen, 2024; 2025). During the workshops, the participants shared their valuable experiences of age-inclusive lifelong learning focusing on enablers, barriers and structures of lifelong learning in Finland, and co-created micro-credentials focusing on older learners aged 55+.

As the workshops and micro-credentials pilots were conducted, the evaluation phase focused on collecting feedback and reflection from participants concerning the final output, the guidelines for age-inclusive lifelong learning (see Myller & Makkonen, 2026). The data corpus from the workshops provided a fruitful source to analyse the meanings given to lifelong learning deeper.

To capture the core points about the experiences and review them through the existing knowledge and the features of critical geragogy, an abductive thematised analysis was used. At the first phase of the analysis, an abductive framework was formulated (Table 1).

Table 1. Framework for abductive analysis.

Features of critical geragogy
Micro-level: Assumptions and stereotypes towards ageing and learning, power relationships between learners and facilitators/educators
Meso-level: Educational offerings, pedagogical choices, accessibility of lifelong learning, learning environments, unequal practices
Macro-level: Policy-level guidance of lifelong learning of older adults, recognising structural mismatch and barriers vs. individual needs of lifelong learning

The analysis framework included the aspects of the definition of critical geragogy at micro-, meso- and macro-levels (e.g., Formosa, 2012; Creech & Hallam, 2015; Stončikaitė 2023). In the second phase, the data from the workshops, mindmaps, notes, and transcriptions were read through by two researchers. Then the data was reviewed through the meanings given to the experiences, and similarities and differences were combined based on the levels of micro, meso and macro. Finally, the findings were reflected through the prior knowledge and European and Finnish policy-level guidelines (UNESCO, 2024; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019) on lifelong learning, and critical geragogy, to formulate the main themes which were as follows: 1) meaning of the learning content and mode – critical geragogy as facilitator, 2) learning environment as an engine to empower – critical geragogy as

environment shaper, and 3) societal structures supporting and challenging lifelong learning – critical geragogy as a revealer of mismatches.

Findings and discussion

Inspiring and interesting learning content and mode – critical geragogy as facilitator

Based on the analysis of older learners' experiences, at micro-level lifelong learning for older adults is most meaningful when it supports *social and emotional inclusion*. Micro-level refers to daily routines and social connections where lifelong learning takes place. Older learners benefit from environments that encourage interaction, shared experiences, and a sense of community, where they can contribute their own knowledge and life experience: "*You can learn from one another when there is different knowledge—how things are approached differently in different places, old knowledge versus new knowledge." (Rural man).* Opportunities for informal exchange, such as conversations and storytelling, enhance motivation, engagement, and the perceived value of learning. At the same time, learning must be meaningful and applicable, aligning with individuals' personal goals and life situations (see Stončikaitė, 2023): *"Teaching must be interesting and aligned with one's own passions" (Urban woman).* Facilitators who can, based on the findings, be the older persons themselves, pedagogues or teachers, thus have an important role in taking into account the diverse learning needs of older adults and connecting communities and persons to learning jointly.

Practical, relevant, and immediately usable content of learning strengthens confidence, reinforces a sense of purpose, and helps learners see education as a valuable tool for navigating daily life and future aspirations. These aspects emphasise the importance of a holistic approach to older learners' learning (Formosa, 2012).Participants described that *social networks and peer relationships* enrich the learning experience by fostering collaboration, mutual encouragement, and shared understanding. Thus, learning becomes a collective process rather than an individual task: *"Peer support is important for learning; it helps people stay at the same level when discussing things, and learners are not just listeners but also active participants." (Rural woman).* However, it is important to consider that the idea that older learners thrive on interaction does not apply to everyone. It assumes all are ready to engage, potentially ignoring those who are marginalised or vulnerable. For some, too much emphasis on interaction can be counterproductive; trust and a sense of safety should come first, with interaction developing later as an outcome (cf. Gonçalves et al., 2024). These findings also strengthen the conception of the important role of the facilitator and consideration of the diversity of older adults.

Lifelong learning for older adults can also support *work-related skills and broader societal participation*. While many older adults are motivated by curiosity, personal development, and social interaction, there are those who seek to remain active in working life or to return to it. In these cases, learning can have economic significance and support the discovery of new roles, including volunteering and community engagement (see Howard Morris et al., 2024). These findings are important and broaden the understanding of learning motivations of older learners: *In my view, there are two aspects to learning and work: learning on the job and managing the demands of work. On the other hand, there is also participation in society in a broader sense, such as volunteering or engaging in other community activities. (Urban woman).* Lifelong learning is much more than career continuum; it can enrich daily life and give meanings.

Learning as an engine to empower -critical geragogy as environment shaper

Based on the analysis, lifelong learning for older adults becomes most meaningful when it is designed to be *inclusive, accessible and responsive* to diverse educational backgrounds. This refers to meso-level, namely learning environments and potential educational structures. As participants described, learning opportunities should also support those with less formal education. Nevertheless, clear language, practical examples, and culturally sensitive approaches that make participation easier and more engaging is important to anyone: *"The group of 55+, middle-aged people, and older adults is a very broad spectrum, many topics are interesting, but academic heaviness is tiring". (Urban woman).* These findings challenge the traditional pedagogical approaches, which typically contain the assumption that education has already been designed, and the only challenge is reaching potential learners. An alternative option would be to involve older adults in the planning of studies, or to identify the learning needs and interests of a specific group and tailor meaningful educational opportunities for them (Formosa, 2012; Creech & Hallam, 2015).

According to participants, the social, cultural, and physical *environment* in which learning takes place also plays a crucial role in older adults' engagement. Comfortable, flexible, and accessible learning spaces, including those in natural settings, can significantly increase participation and well-being. *Practical considerations* such as scheduling and transport connections are important for removing logistical barriers. In addition, *facilitators'* social skills are essential. According to participants, those facilitators who share similar life experiences with learners can make content more approachable and easier to relate to: *--If you get encouragement from an educator, even if it's gently worded criticism, it makes a huge difference. It is important how things are presented; if there are negative feelings related to one's personality or something else – And the atmosphere plays a major role (Rural woman).* This highlights that facilitators can be one of the community members, older learners themselves as well (Gonçalves et al., 2024; Stončikaité, 2023). Furthermore, not only the physical space, but also the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of the learning environment, shaping the overall experience, are important, which is in line with the principles of critical geragogy (eg., Formosa, 2012).

Lifelong learning for older adults can be, as its core, *empowering.* As its best, it supports not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also the development of self-confidence, autonomy, self-efficacy and wellbeing (see Creech & Hallam, 2015; Narushima et al., 2013). As participants described, empowered learners can feel better, and lifelong learning can support sharing wellbeing with other people and close ones of older adults. By understanding the process of empowerment, facilitators and pedagogues can create learning environments and inclusive spaces where older learners feel valued, competent, and motivated (see Creech & Halam, 2015); however, this requires the existence of supportive structures and frameworks: *"There* [in handbook] *are immediately two important words here: meaning and empowerment." (Urban woman).*

Participants emphasised that meaningful lifelong learning benefits from *co-design* with older learners themselves. Co-design strengthens participation and reinforces a sense of dignity and ownership in the learning process, ensuring that lifelong learning is not only designed for older adults, but developed with them as active contributors. These findings challenge traditional pedagogical ways to plan the module and content and hope that the participants sign up. What if potential participants would co-design the material and content?

Societal structures supporting and challenging lifelong learning – critical geragogy as the revealer of mismatches

Based on the analysis, lifelong learning for older adults is shaped not only by motivation and content, but also by how accessible, inclusive, and supportive the surrounding structures are at macro-level, e.g. in policy-level guidelines, alignments and resources (see also Hafford-Letchfield, 2010; Ogg, 2021). *Local accessibility* plays a crucial role in ensuring that learning opportunities reach diverse groups of older adults, particularly in rural areas. Low-threshold, community-based, and informal learning environments help reduce distance-related and logistical barriers, whereas centrally organised provision can unintentionally limit participation. In this sense, lifelong learning becomes more meaningful when it is embedded in local contexts that are easy to reach and engage with. This kind of learning provision, however, has remained scarce in educational structures in Finland, although different kinds of continuous e-learning options are available (Opin.fi, 2026).

Furthermore, participants described that the *role of technology* significantly influences access to learning: *Technology helps with studying, and you can study on your own— but it really depends on the person. (Urban woman).* While digital tools and platforms can expand opportunities, they may also create barriers when participation depends on unfamiliar systems, insufficient digital skills, or compatibility issues. Based on participants' views, for many older learners the requirement to use technology without adequate support can hinder rather than enable engagement. Therefore, identifying and addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that technology supports rather than restricts lifelong learning and people could choose how to learn, without exclusion of society (see Rasi-Heikkinen & Doh, 2021).

Social perceptions and stereotypes further shape older adults' experiences of learning. According to participants, age-inclusive lifelong learning depends on challenging negative attitudes that may discourage participation or undervalue the learning potential of older adults. As analysing the barriers of learning, many participants also referred to memories back to decades: *"Past experiences—back in elementary or middle school—involved a teacher who was a tyrant, telling me "you won't become anything"; that still shows up half a century later." (Rural man).* Additionally, various stereotypes on older learners can exist at different levels, including institutional and policy contexts, for example invisibility of learning in later life and focus on career continuums (see Howard Morris et al., 2024). They can significantly influence whether learning is seen as relevant and accessible in later life (see also Stončikaitė, 2023; Ogg, 2021). Promoting a culture that recognises, reveals and aims to transform things more age-inclusive, and values of learning across all ages, helps strengthen equality, inclusion, and social cohesion in societies.

As participants stated, *financial factors* are also a key determinant of participation in lifelong learning. Costs related to tuition, materials, and the lack of financial support can create substantial barriers, particularly for those on lower incomes. Ensuring fair access requires attention to funding mechanisms such as grants, subsidies, and flexible payment options, so that financial constraints do not exclude individuals from learning opportunities. The questions of free learning options were also highlighted. Making education economically accessible benefits not only individuals but society as a whole by supporting skills development, wellbeing and participation throughout life. For example, the educational policy alignment from 2025 to remove the financial support for adult learners for degree studies was seen as a challenge for many: *"The removal of adult education support [financial assistance] excludes many people from opportunities to retrain for a new profession;*

financial factors must be taken into account. Many would like to change careers but are unable to do so." (Urban woman).

Summary

The paper examined, during the AliVe project, the meanings older Finnish adults assign to lifelong learning and the key elements that support age-inclusive learning. An overview of the findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of findings.

Supportive elements and considerations in lifelong learning	Combined meanings of lifelong learning	Potential of critical geragogy
• Social and emotional inclusion • Practical, relevant and immediately usable content • Social networks and peer relationships enrich learning • Work-related skills and broader societal participation	Inspiring and interesting learning content and mode	Critical geragogy as facilitator
• Inclusive, accessible and responsive designing • Consideration of social, cultural and physical learning environment • Practical considerations such as scheduling and transport • Facilitator's role is important • Empowering • Co-designing	Learning as an engine to empower	Critical geragogy as environment shaper
• Local accessibility • Role of technology • Social perceptions and stereotypes of learning in later life • Financial factors	Societal structures supporting and challenging lifelong learning	Critical geragogy as the revealer of mismatches

The findings show that lifelong learning is associated with meaningful content, flexible participation, and accessible learning environments that foster social connection, empowerment, and engagement. On the other hand, societal structures have an important role in confirming, for example, equal access to lifelong learning options for older learners regardless of the living environment. Based on findings, the role of technology does not fully consider diverse older adults' needs, and policy-level guidelines focusing on work-life continuity and continuous professional development is emphasised. These results align with earlier research and highlight the potential of critical geragogy in recognising, revealing and transforming practices, attitudes, and structures that fail to address the holistic learning needs of older adults.

While critical geragogy helps challenge assumptions about ageing and learning, it also opens space for pedagogical choices such as facilitating role of older learners. Through critical geragogy, communities and their members can be supported to engage, for example, in collective learning and to make this potential visible. Critical geragogy can also impact on forming and supporting flexible learning environments. It offers tools to analyse structural mismatches between the provision and need of lifelong learning of older adults as well. However, it cannot resolve all barriers. Policy frameworks, institutional practices, and delivery modes limit learning opportunities for older adults, as formal and nonformal

education systems rarely prioritise these options for older adults. Additionally, there is a lack of discourse about the lifelong learning of older adults in Finnish society, and it emphasises the increase of retirement age and continuum of work careers. However, prior studies and the findings of this paper underscore the need for research-informed planning and developing of lifelong learning, and further study on the wellbeing dimensions of lifelong learning. The crucial question is how to make the well-being perspective of lifelong learning visible in societal decision-making and what the implicit values guiding decision-making are. Greater attention to intergenerational learning and critical geragogy from the perspectives of educators, NGO facilitators, and informal learning contexts and communities is also warranted.

Strengths and limitations

The strengths of this paper are in detailed experiences captured from AliVe participants, 55 + learners from Finland. The topic is increasingly important, and the findings provide insights that necessarily do not align to mainstream ideas of lifelong learning in later life. However, we have interpreted that the AliVe project mainly reached those target people who were already proactive and actively interested in lifelong learning in later life. The focus on a specific project and a minor number of participants limit the generalisability of the findings. Learning from this, the planning of follow-up work to reach groups of those older adults in diverse positions and those AliVe did not manage to engage, has begun.

Conclusion

Lifelong learning is increasingly recognised as a key component of ageing societies, often linked to economic productivity and extended working lives. However, this dominant framing ignores the broader, social, and societal dimensions of learning in later life. Taking together, prior studies and the findings of this paper highlight that lifelong learning is not primary about maintaining skills for the labour market, but it is about fostering wellbeing, identity, participation, and a sense of meaning. It is also important to communities and societies - as people learn they can feel having a meaningful life, and it supports wellbeing of individuals and communities: *I honestly felt like I couldn't be bothered to go to the adult education center class. I was tired, unmotivated, and ready to stay home. But then I remembered that my friends were waiting for me, and that there are these genuinely kind people there, all showing up for a good reason. I almost didn't go, even though deep down I wanted to be with them. And that's exactly the point: whether the group meets in person or online, what really matters is that the feeling of coming together. That sense that you're part of something, that people are expecting you, that you belong. I think that's the most important thing of all. (Rural woman).*

In conclusion, this paper highlights the importance of understanding lifelong learning among older adults in a holistic way that supports wellbeing in later life. Contemporary policy frameworks risk reinforcing a narrow view that shifts older adults from active agents to passive recipients of lifelong learning. It is essential to ensure that the voices of older adults as regards lifelong learning needs are heard across a broad and diverse population and to better identify and harness the skills and potential within this group that currently remain partly untapped. Heterogeneity of older adults is highlighted, and they cannot be treated as a uniform group. A critical geragogy approach is suitable in recognising diverse needs, aspirations, and constraints when designing meaningful learning opportunities. The co-

development process on lifelong learning also supports paying attention to the importance of learning environments, tools, methods, and the role of local communities.

During the project, we identified ageist attitudes and practices in policy guidance documents, in everyday practices, and within our own ways of working. These attitudes and practices were often subtle and can go unnoticed unless there is an effort to recognise and critically examine them. This emphasises the meaning of practice-critical reflection on everyday practices to avoid reconstructing stereotypes of lifelong learning and ageing.

References

Bauldry, S., Thomas, P. A., Sauerteig-Rolston, M. R., & Ferraro, K. F. (2024). Educational inequalities in dual-function life expectancy. *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, 79*(7), gbae072. https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbae072

Boudiny, K. (2013). “Active ageing”: From empty rhetoric to effective policy tool. *Ageing & Society, 33*(6), 1077–1098. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X1200030X

Brook, J., & Booth, A. (2022). May I have this dance: Examining a community-based dance program for people living with Parkinson’s disease. *Research in Dance Education, 23*(4), 470–484. https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2020.1853693

Creech, A., & Hallam, S. (2015). Critical geragogy: A framework for facilitating older learners in community music. *London Review of Education, 13*(1), 43–57. https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.13.1.05

Finnish Government. (2022). *Competence secures the future: Parliamentary policy approaches for reforming continuous learning.*

Formosa, M. (2012). Critical geragogy: Situating theory in practice. *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies, 5*, 36–54.

Gates, J. R., & Wilson-Menzfeld, G. (2022). What role does geragogy play in the delivery of digital skills programs for middle and older age adults? A systematic narrative review. *Journal of Applied Gerontology, 41*(8), 1971–1980. https://doi.org/10.1177/07334648221091236

Gibney, S., Moran, N., & Shannon, S. (2018). *Barriers to lifelong learning: Results from the HaPAI survey.* Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative (HaPAI).

Gierszewski, D., & Kluzowicz, J. (2021). The role of the University of the Third Age in meeting the needs of older adult learners in Poland. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education, 42*(3), 437–451. https://doi.org/10.1080/02701960.2021.1871904

Gonçalves Gaia, W. N., Vieira da Silva, W., Santos Costa Vieira da Silva, L., Alves Barbosa, M., Kuhn, N., & Veiga, C. P. da. (2024). Enhancing quality of life for older adults through university education: A scoping review. *Educational Gerontology, 50*(11), 973–992. https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2024.2368319

Hafford-Letchfield, T. (2010). The age of opportunity? Revisiting assumptions about the lifelong learning opportunities of older people using social care services. *The British Journal of Social Work, 40*(2), 496–512. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcp004

Hager, P. (2021). Concepts and definitions of lifelong learning. In M. London (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of lifelong learning* (2nd ed., pp. 13–34). Oxford University Press.

Howard Morris, T., Brandi, U., Hodge, S., Hoggan-Kloubert, T., & Milana, M. (2024). Social justice through lifelong education: The balancing of self-directed learning outcomes towards ourselves and others. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 43*(6), 573–578. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2024.2418661

IARA. (2026). *AliVe: Age-inclusive lifelong learning: Micro-credentials and guidelines.* https://www.iara.ac.at/alive/

Kleemola, K., Hadjar, A., Haas, C., Hyytinen, H., Tuononen, T., Powell, J. J. W., & Toom, A. (2025). Struggling for equal access and success: Disability in European higher education. *Comparative Education, 61*(4), 606–626. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2025.2466905

Ministry of Education and Culture. (2019). *Jatkuvan oppimisen kehittäminen: Työryhmän väliraportti.* https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/48706adf-cbeb-4b50-9147-eca4b425d35e/content

Montayre, J., Maneze, D., Salamonson, Y., Tan, J. D. L., & Possamai-Inesedy, A. (2023). The making of age-friendly universities: A scoping review. *The Gerontologist, 63*(8), 1311–1319.

Myller, T., & Makkonen, H. (2024). Ikäystävällinen jatkuva oppiminen maaseudun näkökulmasta [Age-inclusive lifelong learning from the perspective of older adults]. Karelia University of Applied Sciences. https://www.karelia.fi/2024/11/ikaystavallinen-jatkuva-oppiminen-maaseudun-nakokulmasta/

Myller, T., & Makkonen, H. (2025). Kuulumisia AliVe-hankkeesta ja ikääntyvien mikro-opintojen pilotista Kareliassa [Greetings from AliVe project and the micro-credentials of older learners from Karelia UAS]. *Ikänyt*, 1/2025. Karelia University of Applied Sciences. https://www.karelia.fi/2025/03/kuulumisia-alive-hankkeesta-ja-ikaantyvien-mikro-opintojen-pilotista-kareliassa/

Myller, T., & Makkonen, H. (2026). *Ikäystävällinen elinikäinen oppiminen: Käsikirja mikro-opintojen suunnitteluun ja toteuttamiseen kohderyhmänä 55+ -vuotiaat* [Age-inclusive lifelong learning: Guidelines for designing and implementation of microcredentials with and for 55+ years older adults]. Karelia University of Applied Sciences. https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/913586

Narushima, M., Liu, J., & Diestelkamp, N. (2013). The association between lifelong learning and psychological well-being among older adults: Implications for interdisciplinary health promotion in an aging society. *Activities, Adaptation & Aging, 37*(3), 239–250. https://doi.org/10.1080/01924788.2013.816834

Ogg, J. (2021). *Lifelong learning in ageing societies: Lessons from Europe: Embracing a culture of lifelong learning.* UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

Opin.fi. (2026). *Avaa ajattelusi.[Open your tinhking].* https://opin.fi/fi

Rasi-Heikkinen, P., & Doh, M. (2023). Older adults and digital inclusion. *Educational Gerontology, 49*(5), 345–347. https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2023.2205743

Stončikaitė, I. (2023). The "inside" of ageing: Autoethnography in critical geragogy. *Educational Gerontology, 49*(9), 773–789. https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2022.2161036

Torku, A., Chan, A. P. C., & Yung, E. H. K. (2021). Age-friendly cities and communities: A review and future directions. *Ageing & Society, 41*(10), 2242–2279.

UNECE. (2026). *Meeting with the chair of the standing working group on ageing.* https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2026-01/Item%205_%202026%203_%20SWGA%20Chair%20report_2026_0.pdf

UNESCO. (2025). *What do you need to know about lifelong learning?* https://www.unesco.org/en/lifelong-learning/need-know

Virolainen, M. H., et al. (2024). The evolving role of Finnish universities of applied sciences in the regional innovation ecosystem. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2024.2443905

Ward, R., et al. (2023). Using skills profiling to enable badges and micro-credentials to be incorporated into higher education courses. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education, 2023*(1).

World Health Organization. (2007). *Global age-friendly cities: A guide.* https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/08caa73b-5934-4b6b-bffe-d27fbe92e6e7/content

World Health Organization. (2024). *The "school of seniors": A lifelong learning model.* https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/afp/the-school-of-seniors-a-lifelong-learning-model/

Authors' biography

Dr. Terhi Myller works as a principal lecturer at Karelia UAS in the Bachelor's Degree Programme of Social and Health Care in Applied Gerontology and in the Master's Degree Programme in Active Ageing. She is also a coordinator in the Joint European Master's Programme EMMA from Karelia UAS. She has a visiting researcher's position (post doc) in the University of Eastern Finland in the Department of Social Sciences (2023-2026) and actively publishes scientific papers. She has studied social work, social policy and education studies, and holds a doctoral degree in Social Sciences. Her research interests focus on social work practices, professional work culture of social work, and contextual issues, management and policy-level issues of wellbeing, ageing, and participatory approaches. She coordinates Karelia UAS' research community on age-friendliness (KAFS) and has been involved in developing a model of an age-friendly community of practice. Currently, she works in international and national projects as a project manager, in AliVe (Age-inclusive lifelong learning: Guidelines and micro-credentials) and

in a national higher education development project of applied gerontology students, GEROS (2025-2027). She is focusing on qualitative research.

Dr. Heli Makkonen is a Principal Lecturer at Karelia University of Applied Sciences, where she teaches in the Master's Degree Programme in Active Ageing and in the Bachelor's Degree Programme in Social Services. She holds a Doctoral Degree in Education from the University of Eastern Finland. She has worked at the Karelia UAS for over 20 years and has been involved in various national and international projects related to ageing for the past ten years. She is a member of Karelia UAS' research community KAFS (Karelia research community on age-friendliness). She worked as a project manager in the EAFS project (RDI Excellence in Creating an Age-friendly Society in Remote Areas) in the years 2020–2023. In this project, she was involved in developing age-friendly working life. Currently, she works as a project specialist in international project AliVe (Age-inclusive lifelong learning: Guidelines and micro-credentials, 2024-2026) and in national project Jointly – Cultural well-being for older people (2026-2028). Her research interests include lifelong and sustainable learning, ageing, social wellbeing, and social and cultural sustainability.

Name: Dr Frances-Ann Norton

Affiliation: Leeds Arts University, UK

Title: Challenging exclusionary UK educational policy for over 60s: Developing alternative provision with older people for a Bradford Folk School to aid combating loneliness

Abstract

There is a dearth of provision, visibility, funding or relevant policy in the UK for Adult Learning & Education (ALE). The new Lifelong Learning Entitlement to be rolled out 2027 does not fund ALE for over 60s, in response charities such as Centre for Ageing Better are calling for a future Commissioner for older people to act as a representative at the House of Commons. Pedagogic policy and provision for the over 60s has fallen to NGOs such as, university of the third age (U3A) and Age.uk . The Nordic Folk School model offers community, skills-based ALE, and may be a format to be replicated on a small scale with older people in Bradford UK where this research is situated. This qualitative paper utilises narrative inquiry, questionnaires, photography and field notes to thematically analyse datasets. This may heuristically illustrate a wider pattern of NGOs providing pedagogy for over 60s in a neoliberal landscape with little policy or funding from government. Future co-creation with older people is the method for the initial stages of discovering content and provision. A future Bradford Folk School at an inclusive Catholic Parish might be one way to offer a variety of ALE folk activities, critical thinking skills and cultural input to lifelong learners; a way to combat loneliness through connection, creativity, faith and community. Slow learning in a fast paced world.

Key Words: Older People, critical thinking, folk school, combating loneliness, slow pedagogy

Aim: How did I get here?

I aim to co-develop pedagogic strategies with lifelong learners to increase connection, communication, activity, and critical thinking in order to combat loneliness. I have knowledge and skills in education, faith formation and critical thinking. Using a Folk School model as an umbrella, under which we might co-create ways of organising and empowering older people through ALE; we might create moments of community, belonging, participation and an enhancement.

Universities and educators across the UK and Europe have experienced funding cuts, a neoliberal political reaction to mega-level crises, the Pandemic, social instability with food insecurity, cost of living criticism & fuel poverty, as well as the impact of war on the world. I thrive on creativity and criticality. I enjoy scaffolding my students to think more deeply, ask questions, and self-actualise. I enjoy walking with people as they are transformed by the pedagogic process to be more authentically themselves. Umberto Eco calls this the *Open Work* (1989), interdisciplinary, multifaceted education; moving from a model of passive consumption to one of active engagement, reflecting the complexities and instabilities of modern culture.

In my role as a Parish Pastoral Worker I teach and work with older people. This neatly plaits together the strands of my faith, my creative practice and my scholarship in critical thinking in education. I am also a Catholic Francisican, I try to live simply, living in the world but not part of the world (John 17: 13-15)

Main Perspective

UK Policy on Education for Older People

lordslibrary.parliament.uk (2025) states that lifelong learning can have numerous benefits including helping keep the mind sharp and improve memory. Laal (2012 writes that lifelong learning is diverse, adapted to the individual and available throughout our lives. Benefits are coping with the fast-changing world and enriching and fulfilling life. Lifelong learners also benefit from developing broader perspectives and keeping up with technologies.
Lordslibrary (2025) states the lifelong learning entitlement (LLE) in 2027 will replace the current student loan, with a cut off age of 60. This excludes those over 60 for taking up this loan. Much of the other proposed provision is employability focused.

In 2024, the UK government published 'The English devolution white paper' (Gov.uk 2024). The paper stated that non-apprenticeship adult skills funding will be devolved to mayoral authorities. The authorities can now decide how they wish to prioritise funding. What does this mean for older adults in Bradford when West Yorkshire is not included in the seven regions? Local community colleges, u3a ageuk, Growing Old Gracefully, and private local education centres will be the places over 60s might get teaching and learning in the devolved funding model.

Global Organisations Policy on Lifelong Learning

WHO, (2026) states that while the UK as a whole is classed as a high income economy (SSHB, 2026) the UK faces significant income inequality and lower-income families are poorer than many European counterparts. Bradford is one of the poorer post-industrial cities in the North of the UK. The United Nations (UN, 2026) declared 2021–2030 the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing. Longer lives are one of humanity's greatest achievements. Ennals *et al.* (2014) describe the term; doing, being, becoming and belonging, first established by Wilcock (1998) in relation to the changes in our lives. Change might cause identity confusion, regression, mixed perceptions about comfort and camouflage. Older people are in the midst of change. Change to identities, they are growing older, changing health, losing confidence, losing independence, losing identity, losing life partners, losing children when they grow up and move away and losing their old life when they were young. Lifelong learning must see the whole person, understand the instability change can affect, and offer structure through the educational process. Active ageing (WHO, 2026) means that education is central for promoting social integration, autonomy and wellbeing.

Bradford Context

Bradford is in West Yorkshire in the North of the UK and has a total population of 563,600. It is the fifth largest city in England. It has a history in the textiles industry. Jackson (1992) reports that in the 1950s, Bradford's mill owners, faced with a shortage of labour at the end of the Second World War turned to Mirpur in Pakistan for workers. Like much of post-industrial Northern England, Bradford has now experienced economic decline with the decrease in importance of the textile industry.

gov.uk (2025) states that the largest proportion of Bradford's population identified themselves as White British (56.7%) Asian or British Asian population 32.1%. Christians form the largest faith group 33.4%, followed by Muslims 30.5% . In the Index of Multiple Deprivation Bradford is the 12th most deprived in England. In the last twenty years Bradfordians have become poorer, sicker, more uneducated and less well housed. 12% of working age people have no qualifications and 24% of Bradford's residents aged 16+ have no qualifications. Voters in Bradford strongly supported leaving the European Union in the 2016 referendum; an estimated 67% voted in favour of Brexit, one of the highest rates in the country. Yet Bradfordians are also community minded, caring family focused, residents and parishioners who do not move far from each other.

Mary Mother of God Context

The site of this study is Mary Mother of God Parish, Diocese of Leeds. It consists of two churches St Theresa & St Winefriede (built in 1973) in Wibsey and St John the Evangelist (built in 1933) in Buttershaw in South Bradford. Wibsey and Buttershaw have a total population of approximately 21,500, (Bradford.gov 2026). 13.8% of the local population is aged 65 to 84 with 2.1% aged 85 and over. Wibsey and Buttershaw have huge 1940s council housing estates.

Parishioners come from local, Irish, Italian, African, Keralan Indian, Polish, Latvian, Russian and traveller communities (Gypsy Roma). The Older People in the congregation are in the majority white working class people. Participant Moira tells me she and her husband came over in the 1960s from Ireland so he could build the M62 motorway. It is a close knit faith community. De Jong Gierveld & Perlman (2006) write that when people are spiritual friends and have built a faith community around a parish then this is a very strong nonkin relationship. As Parish Pastoral Worker I have ties with the organisations that fund my work. 'Growing Old Gracefully ', The Marist Fathers and The Ladies of the Grail.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines an inductive roadmap to guide the reader through the key concepts used to navigate the field of education and Parish Pastoral Work in the context of a Catholic Parish in Bradford UK. The research question firstly points out that current UK educational policy excludes 60s (as they are outside the employability model favoured for training) and asks how we might co-create alternative provision, funded alternatively, in order to begin developing a Bradford Folk School. My tentative theory is

that a co-created Folk School and pedagogic content with older people will be a place over 60s to learn and thrive, where they have purpose, feel included and seen and are treated as valued members of society. This increases wellbeing, and combats loneliness by fostering community, connection and a place to be and get busy.

Key Concept: Loneliness

Consuelo Velázquez Alva & Sabates (2025) state there are social benefits to lifelong learning that empowers older adults to develop healthy minds and bodies. It introduces them to digital literacy, enabling them to remain connected and reduce isolation, depression and loneliness. Education is central to understanding and preventing age discrimination (ageism), promoting gender equality in old age, and ensuring equitable access to resources. Education bridges intergenerational barriers between older adults and younger generations. These include cultural differences, changing perceptions, understanding new trends and acceptability of broader perspectives of equity and inclusion, and technological gaps. WHO, (2026) writes that loneliness is especially prevalent in Older people. As people age, risk factors that might lead to loneliness can begin to increase and converge such as bereavement, living alone, limiting disabilities or illnesses, low fixed incomes, or digital exclusion and specific life circumstances like retirement, being widowed, and being socially isolated.

Key Concept: Folk School

The definition of "folk" originates from the Folk High School movement of Denmark: N.F.S. Grundtvig's folk high school (Grand, 2026). Folk School facilitates education that is non-competitive, non-graded, non-compulsory, and consisting of mostly avocational opportunities. Folk schools are about people coming together, building community and connection, making concrete connections in society. She continues that Folk School offers cultural identity development with embodied (Butler 2019), anti-oppression (Centre for Innovation, 2026), decolonised (Wright, 2020) work. Folk School seeks to mitigate the effects of oppression such as racism, sexism, and classism and equalize power for marginalized groups through critical self-reflection, advocacy, and structural change. (Centre for Innovation, 2026) Within the catholic church anti-oppression would be a tenet of love thy neighbor as thyself (Mtt.22:39)

Eiben (2015) describes Folk school as a place to connect, build community resources, and network collaboration. Folk schools can provide enrichment and balance. It offers an alternative educational paradigm, one that is collaborative, experiential, and holistic. Hedegaard & Hugo (2020) write that Folk High Schools' lifelong learner courses are organized together *with* the participants. This interaction gives rise to an unpretentious and intercultural learning experience. This is a model I hope to use with the group of older people at Mary Mother of God Parish.

Key Concept: Slow Pedagogy & Critical Thinking

Slow looking, Slow crafting, Slow living, Slow learning and teaching, Slow pedagogy. Tishman, (2017) is interested in forms of thinking that go beyond basic literacies, thinking skills that help people learn to think critically, reflectively, and creatively. Lipman agrees that critical thinking cannot just be in the mind or the head. For thinking to be truly critical one must also add creative thinking and caring thinking (2003).

Slow pedagogy is when we create spaces to take our time, allow ourselves the luxury to really look, concentrate, really be in the moment with whatever or whoever we are with.

Older people need that extra time to move more slowly. What pedagogic spaces are there for older people to be themselves in, their slower, wiser, more thoughtful selves? Critical thinking is not just the preserve of academics, it is incumbent on us all to put apathy to one side, to ask questions of ourselves, of the world we live in and ask them of those in power.

Equipping older people with critical thinking skills keeps their minds active, keeps them doing (WHO, 2026) keeps them purposeful, this is what leads to wellbeing and an enhanced life well into older ageing. British Geriatric Society (2014) tells us that although older people have ageing bodies to deal with they have an unconquered spirit, they are not frail and fragile and diminished in every way, they are wise, thoughtful, and generous with their time.

Tishman (2017) continues that many of us rarely slow down and look around. Yet older people have already slowed down their speed of life, retired from paid work and retired from being active parents of young children. Many cultures place value on doing and progress but do not slow down to see the world through the lens of wisdom and equanimity, seeing beyond what one can view immediately is underestimated. Slow looking happens everywhere and can often appear as a passive state from the outside. Older people viewed by the speedy can appear to have stalled in life, halted, but what appears to be a passive state is actually a moment of creation, collaging ideas, collaborating with the self in creating new thought.

Collett *et al.* (2018) write that by Slowing down, or decolonising time, we are able to reconnect with ourselves and others and nurture relationships to improve the quality of life and work (Shahjahan, 2015). The proposed Folk School in Bradford aims to provide a pace of Slow Pedagogy, a place to nurture and cherish community relationships built on faith. Reflection, debate, thinking, reading and writing could be undertaken through the lens of creativity and caring thinking. Tishman (2017) describes Slow Looking, as a way of discerning complexities that cannot be grasped quickly, and it involves a distinctive set of skills and dispositions that have a different center of gravity than those involved in other modes of learning.

Key Concept: Practice Research

In my doctoral thesis (Norton, 2022) I write about the relationship between practice and theory that has traditionally been seen as a dichotomy but practice-focused research brings theory and practice together. Practice research and narrative inquiry (McNiff, 2007) are closely linked within qualitative research paradigms Leavy, (2019, p.8) attributes this to factors, including the narrative turn, which she explains as the emergence of narrative inquiry inside and outside of the academy. Practice researchers have a greater capacity to see a synergy between story and practice. Practice research is a transdisciplinary approach to knowledge building that can be used in educational contexts. It is a methodological tool used by researchers across disciplines during any or all phases of research, including problem generation, data or content generation, analysis, interpretation, and representation.

Key Concept: Catholic Pedagogic Perspective

Groome (2014) writes that Catholic education arises from the deep structures and earliest traditions of Christian faith. Its commitments throughout the centuries have been to educate both from and for faith. It draws upon the universal values of Catholicism to provide a distinctive philosophy and spirituality, for its content, purpose and ethos. By drawing upon its deepest faith-based convictions, Catholic education can be 'for the life of the world' (John 6:51).

The Catholic Education Service (2024) states that Catholic Church teaching on education emphasizes the holistic formation of the person, intellectual, physical, and spiritual, ordered towards both earthly responsibilities and eternal destiny, as well as (Whittle, 2014) the common good of society. The older people of the future Folk School will be co-creators that are already rooted in the Catholic faith.

The Catholic Education Service (2024) states adult education is to ensure that proper freedom of inquiry leads to a deeper understanding of how faith and reason accord in one truth. Such institutions should enable those of slender means to attend.

Key Concept: Parish Pastoral Worker

Kirk (2018) writes that the role of the Parish Pastoral Worker is to work in partnership with the priests and pastoral council of a parish or group of parishes in the 4 areas of: Educating, promoting lifelong learning in the Catholic tradition; Praying, enhancing the prayer and worship of the parish community; Animating, bearing witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and encouraging involvement in initiatives expressing the mission of the Church; Relating, building community through quality relationships and pastoral care.

Spiritual characteristics of a Parish Pastoral Worker is that they can be men or women practising Catholics, Non-Ordained: They are distinct from priests. Lay Ecclesial Minister: They act as representatives of the church in the community. Compassionate Care: They are tasked with bringing Christian caring actions to complex human issues. Collaborative: They usually serve within a team structure, supporting the parish priest and working with parish pastoral councils.

Methodology & Method

The qualitative approach is a constructivist ontology building knowledge and meaning-making and takes experience as being constituted of multiple realities (Vygotsky, 2012: Dewey, 1986). Constructing meaning heuristically from multiple social and educational realities I draw from literature, experience, knowledge as a Parish Pastoral Worker and from the older people themselves. Hermeneutic epistemology is indicative of phenomena within the social and educational reality and knowledge is interpreted through literature and data. Gadamer (2013) explains that hermeneutics extract meaning and analysis from intertextual and practice based teaching and learning contexts. Looking at the triangulation between literature and data and experience and interpreting the connections in the context of Mary Mother of God Parish. Galman (2013) explains that 'bottom up' inductive methodology begins with participants at Mary Mother of God and inductively moves towards potentially generalisable understanding of wider educational context for lifelong learners. Our small story recorded in field notes and documentary photography can be heuristically applicable to educational contexts in a wider field than our own.

Thematic analysis contributes a flexible way of working with dataset analysis (Nowell *et al.*, 2017) and can thus provide rich, unexpected insights and detailed knowledge. It also offers an accessible and systematic way of making sense of data. The method for data collection was the De Jong-Gierveld (1987, 119-128) 11 item Loneliness Scale. It incorporates the social network and personality characteristics. The Scale is chosen because the focus is on both emotional and social loneliness and the scale was designed for Older People. Davidson (2015) writes that Foucault discusses power asymmetries in Western culture, relating to the aging body, and the professional paternalistic gaze. He discusses the pervasiveness of power but stresses that where there is power there is resistance. In order to resist power, however, individuals need to gain critical

consciousness. Challenging the status quo is essential if the dominant discourses regarding ageing are to be changed.

Field notes are used to record ideas, conversations, critical incident vignette thoughts, links to literature. Photography is also used as an aide memoir and as documentary evidence of things that went on, and a visual prompt to conversations. I operate much of the time as a visual artist so visual book marks and visual prompts are a great way of putting myself back in the room to remember things.

I would collect informal field note data during my week. There are palaces I will go to to catch up with older parishioners and find out how they are, and what is going on in their lives. A place I might go is the Tuesday & Wednesday Lunch Club run by Catholic Care (and older people who volunteer). I run a bereavement support group and older people will come to that , the Fatima Group where older people go to the primary school to spend the afternoon with the children. Less often are pilgrimage trips to holy places such Our Lady of the Crag in Knaresborough. The thrive group combines healthy eating with exercise for older people. The Food Market food bank is a gathering place for older people. One off events such as the memory box and afternoon tea and the icon painting afternoon where older people would gravitate.

Data & Findings

The sample is 40 Catholic Older People they are Catholic, Christian, agnostic, atheist, married to a Catholic, Catholic heritage, Cultural Catholics that is those who might have been born catholic but don't go to mass. Data was collected from a Loneliness Scale questionnaire, through photographic documentation, and fieldnotes. These were hand written and recorded on my mobile phone. Data was collected at older people's events at Mary Mother of God Parish.

I used the questionnaire during home visits. There were three responses to the questionnaires. They were quite awkward to initiate. Introducing them meant delving into personal feelings. It made me feel awkward asking. One participant began crying during the questionnaire, and I was pained for having brought her to a place of desolation and grief. After the first three I considered that just talking to people about loneliness would be enough and that I could do it in a more sensitive way.

The result of the questionnaire showed that all participants are lonely, they all live at home and are all historical migrants to the UK travelling to the UK as young people, to find a better way of life. They are from Italy, the Caribbean and Ireland. They all have children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, these relatives are close by and visit daily with company, food and housework help. Since then one of the participants has sadly died, she also had the highest loneliness score.

The questionnaires point to all participants being moderately, to severely lonely. The need for provision in the parish is there. One lady comes to everything, the fact that she spends her time being involved in groups is significant. Working towards a Folk School might be part of the solution of providing more moments to be together.

A critique of De Jong in Wong *et al.* (2022) is that the participants had various challenges responding to the loneliness scale, much as I did. They found diverse meanings of loneliness, and that there are multi-faceted factors of loneliness. They recommend using qualitative open-ended questions that can complement the scale by providing useful insights into context and complex experiences.

Field notes and photographs indicate that being in a Catholic community part of a parish community and part of a wider family group means that there are events for them to go to

such as the Lunch club, there is an Access bus for those with low income and mobility issues. Anecdotally I can see that tolerance is high and flexible towards other community members, issues are worked out, differences accepted, because it is a group held together by more than personal feeling, held together by a common purpose, that of exercising their Catholic faith.

When thinking about a Folk School there are important elements to get it right for older people, accessibility, refreshments and mobility are crucial. From being part of the Catholic Care team providing lunches I can see how much background work needs to be in place before anyone comes through the door, and this is not a one person job, a team of volunteers are needed to make it work.

Ethics Statement

During the research participant agreement was given before taking the questionnaire, before taking photographs and in any public or private situation. A photography release form was used, participants had the right to refuse or withdraw their approval. The project was passed by the ethics committee at Leeds Arts university.

Discussion

Learning and Work Institute (L&W 2024a) finds that older people are much less likely to participate in learning. They show small rises in learning participation with more people learning online and informally. This could be an outcome of the Folk School where older people learn to create content through online video platforms such as tiktok, youtube or Instagram. L&W (2024a) comments that people have an innate interest in learning, with advances in technology giving them new ways to take part in learning. The government needs to act to invest in and promote learning for all. L&W (2024b) suggest learning can be held back by attitudes to learning, including whether people think it will benefit them. It is also limited by more than a decade of public funding cuts, with government investment in skills now £1 billion lower in England than in 2010. Lifelong learning needs to be a bigger priority for us all including those with power over directing Government policy on education for Older People. L&W, 2024b state people from the "highest social grade" are most likely to participate in learning. Time, financial pressures and "feeling too old" are the most commonly reported barriers affecting people's participation in learning (L&W, 2024b pp 7 and 38).

The GOS say lifelong learners can be more open to learning at key moments of transition, like changing jobs, preparing for parenting, grandparenting, or experiencing a major life event like divorce or bereavement or retirement. In some areas, local councils like Bradford are proposing closures of adult education centres. House of Commons (2024) "will not fund provision where the primary or sole intent of the learning is for leisure". For older people past the age of employment, the kind of educational opportunities they need are wellbeing, enhancement, critically challenging and interesting content. Not employability focus, but a mental health wellbeing focus.

Joined up thinking about the impact of boredom, loneliness and exclusion on the lives of older people in terms of accessing the NHS more would push funding from health care over into education as they see a distinct line of relevance between the two. WHO (2026) tells us that lifelong learning can help preserve a sense of self, identity, relevance, purpose in the world. Catholic church teaching on older people (Catechism, 1995. 2217-8) explicitly tells us that we must give our parents (and all older people) "material and moral support in old age and in times of illness, loneliness, or distress…" Conversely, it continues that failure to honour your father and mother… "brings great harm to communities and to individuals". White (2024) writes that as Catholics, we are called to do more than live

peacefully in private. We are called to be better sons and daughters to our community's elderly.

Headgaard and Hugo, (2020) write that participation in adult education offers a context where older people can be included in society, experience meaningfulness, and create the conditions for their own well-being. Lifelong learning could ease the social care, social welfare, NHS bill. From a gerontological perspective, older people's participation in meaningful activities has been described as 'being, becoming, and belonging' (Wilcock 1998).

Conclusion & Significance to the Field

A Bradford Folk School may provide a place and content through grants and funding for lifelong learners to bridge intergenerational gaps, to find community, busyness, a place to have an active mind, a purposeful mind and body, a place to feel less lonely. Lots of organisations are already working to make the case for lifelong learning, but to be most effective, this needs to be more joined up. NGOs in the UK affecting lifelong learning, educations, rights and policy affecting Older People include U3A, L&W, WHO, UN, UNESCO, UKFIET, Growing Old Gracefully, Age UK, Bradford Senior Power, St Vincent De Paul (SVP). Partners together will help to develop a fresh approach that has the best chance of influencing educational policy affecting older people and achieving the impact of gaining more funding, more resources, more positive visibility for older people and more educational programmes for local older people.

Collected narratives from datasets may lead to a Combatting Loneliness Manifesto written with lifelong learners, or a 'Combatting Loneliness' pamphlet with practical tips to aiding good mental health. The shape of the future Folk School and the content of its courses aim to be developed with a volunteer working group. The values, ethics and spirituality of the endeavour will be rooted in the Catholic faith, and Bernstein's pedagogic rights (2000) of inclusion, enhancement and participation. Content might include tech skills, a fix-it club, an upcycling and mending group, crafts group, music and choir, spiritual formation and training for Catholic ministries. All in discussion and negotiation with older people.

Anecdotal evidence from older people in the datasets indicates they are given devices and they want to be part of family connectivity but cannot use technology. In effect digital illiteracy is adding to their loneliness. We hear that too much social media and screen time is detrimental to mental health of young people whilst conversely no screen time or social media and connection is adding to loneliness and disconnectedness of older people. I imagine how the Catholic pedagogic perspective could inspire future content of teaching and learning at this future Folk School. There must be a sweet spot somewhere in this dichotomy where older people and young people work together sharing skills, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Young people spend less time on screen by teaching older people that will help confidence and deepen connections and community, whilst older people will feel the intergenerational benefit of working with young people. As Consuelo Velázquez Alva & Sabates (2026) write, this way of being together helps broaden older people's tolerance for difference while improving their digital skills and taking away the technology fear factor. Encourage a buddy system a coming together of existing volunteers and members of the Youth Club and older people could facilitate some of these ideas

This study contributes to policy discussions in ALE by illuminating the lack of UK policy on pedagogic provision for Older People. Instead, suggesting a Folk School umbrella model, which holds together a suite of nonvocational, enriching, illuminating, critical classes co-created by and for older people. This idea is offered to policy makers and funders so more funding can be released for the education of older people.

Acknowledgement
I acknowledge support and funding from Leeds Arts University, Growing Old Gracefully. With thanks to these organisations and the people who have helped this research, especially the older people who are my participants, Mgr Paul Grogan Parish priest at Mary Mother of God Parish. Pax et Bonnum, with thanks to God.

References for folk school paper

References

Age.UK (2026). University of the 3rd Age (U3A) https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/education-training/university-of-the-third-age/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=23761203752&gbraid=0AAAADyp8JISrDuY-intinAJYDdvPhPHi&gclid=CjwKCAjwzLHPBhBTEiwABaLsSr7FbwPp75Jt5R6M24iO2U75ACeDjdnMZFO7MO0YyiuAHPLDfd8vVRoCfsEQAvD_BwE

Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control, and identity* (Vol. 5). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Bradford.Gov (2026). Understanding Bradford District (2026) https://www.bradford.gov.uk/understanding-bradford-district/understanding-bradford-district

Bradford.Gov (2026). City of Bradford 2021 Census results on ethnicity. https://www.bradford.gov.uk/media/o2pdvucb/2021-census-ethnic-group-religion-and-language.pdf

British Geriatric Society (2014) Introduction to Frailty, Fit for Frailty. https://www.bgs.org.uk/introduction-to-frailty

Brookfield, S. (2002). Adult cognition as a dimension of lifelong learning. In *Lifelong Learning* (pp. 89-101). London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2019). Bodily inscriptions, performative subversions. In *Routledge International Handbook of Heterosexualities Studies* (pp. 48-57). Routledge.

Catholic Church, & Pope John Paul II. (1995). Catechism of the Catholic Church. Christus Rex et Redemptor Mundi, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana (Vatican Publishing House).

The Catholic Education Service (2024). What does Vatican II say about education? https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/news/what-does-vatican-ii-say-about-education#:~:text=Although%20mainly%20concerned%20with%20schools,'primary%20and%20principal%20educators'.

Centre for Ageing Better (2026). Political parties urged to include commitment to Commissioner for Older People and Ageing in election manifestoes https://ageing-better.org.uk/news/political-parties-urged-include-commitment?_gl=1*1b1a5hs*_up*MQ..*_gs*MQ..&gclid=CjwKCAjwzLHPBhBTEiwABaLsSnBwZX0DgL9ekDtFN0yFnwTJHfKz8ARsUqH8K0nqE4UF4dbLzcy5yhoC0CUQAvD_BwE&gbraid=0AAAAADQc_k-K9IsPts_vA7kwzyPh1L_F

Centre for innovation in Campus Mental Health (2026). ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE: A GUIDE FOR MOVING FROM THEORY TO ACTION PART 1. https://campusmentalhealth.ca/toolkits/anti-oppressive-practice/what-is-anti-

oppressive-practice/#:~:text=Anti%2DOppressive%20Practice%20is%20both,imbalances%20that%20exist%20between%20people.

Collett, K. S., Van den Berg, C. L., Verster, B., & Bozalek, V. (2018). Incubating a slow pedagogy in professional academic development: An ethics of care perspective. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *32*(6), 117-136.

Consuelo Velázquez Alva, M., & Sabates, R. (2025) If not today, it will be tomorrow: the significant role of education in promoting active ageing, ukfiet.com the Education and Development Forum https://www.ukfiet.org/2025/if-not-today-it-will-be-tomorrow-the-significant-role-of-education-in-promoting-active-ageing/

Darlow, A., Bickerstaffe, T., Burden, T., Green, J., Jassi, S., Johnson, S., Kelsey, S., Purcell, M., South, J., & Walton, F. (2005). Researching Bradford: a review of social research on Bradford District.

Davison, J. (2015). *Researching Ageing Bodies in the Home: A Foucauldian Analysis*. University of Northumbria at Newcastle (United Kingdom).

De Jong Gierveld (1987) Developing and testing a model of loneliness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol 53(1), Jul 1987, 119-128

De Jong Gierveld, J., & Perlman, D. (2006). Long-standing nonkin relationships of older adults in the Netherlands and the United States. *Research on Aging*, *28*(6), 730-748.

De Jong-Gierveld, J., & van Tilburg, T. G. (2006). A 6-item scale for overall, emotional, and social loneliness: Confirmatory tests on survey data. *Research on aging*, *28*(5), 582-598.

De Jong Gierveld, J. (1998). A review of loneliness: concept and definitions, determinants and consequences. *Reviews in clinical gerontology*, *8*(1), 73-80.

Dewey, J. (1986, September). Experience and education. In *The educational forum* (Vol. 50, No. 3, pp. 241-252). Taylor & Francis Group.

Eco, U. (1989). *The open work*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Eiben (2015). A brief history of folk schools https://www.folkschoolalliance.org/a-brief-history-of-folk-schools

Ennals, P., Fortune, T., Williams, A., & D'Cruz, K. (2016). Shifting occupational identity: doing, being, becoming and belonging in the academy. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 35(3), 433–446. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1107884

Gadamer, H.G. (2013). *Truth and Method*. Translated by J. Weinsheimer, & D.G. Marshall. 2nd edn. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Galman, S. C. (2013). *The good, the bad, and the data: Shane the lone ethnographer's basic guide to qualitative data analysis*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Government Office for Science (GOS) (2017). 'If lifelong learning is so good, why don't more adults join in?' https://foresightprojects.blog.gov.uk/2017/03/21/if-lifelong-learning-is-so-good-why-dont-more-adults-join-in/

Gov.uk (2024). Policy paper. English Devolution White Paper. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper

Gov.uk (2025). English indices of deprivation 2025: statistical release. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2025/english-indices-of-deprivation-2025-statistical-release#main-findings

Gov.uk (2026). Life Long Learning Entitlement https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lifelong-learning-entitlement-lle-overview/lifelong-learning-entitlement-overview

Grand, R. (2026). What is a Folk School? An interview Dawn Murphy, Vice President of the Folk Education Association of America https://www.folkschool.org/2023/02/15/dawn-murphy-folk-education/

Groome, T. (2014). Catholic education: from and for faith. *International Studies in Catholic Education*, *6*(2), 113-127.

Growing Old Gracefully (2026). https://www.growingoldgracefully.org.uk/

Hedegaard, J., & Hugo, M. (2020). Inclusion through Folk High School courses for senior citizens. *Educational Gerontology*, *46*(2), 84–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2020.1712773

Healthy Minds Bradford - Bradford and District Senior Power https://www.healthyminds.services/services/bradford-and-district-senior-power-450

House of Commons, (2024) 'Written question: Adult education: Finance (3053)' https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-08-30/3053

Howell. D. (2019). What is a Folk School. https://folkcraftrevival.com/

Institute for Fiscal Studies, (IFS) (2026). Adult Education and Skills. https://ifs.org.uk/education-spending/adult-education-and-skills

Jackson, P. (1992). The racialization of labour in post-war Bradford. *Journal of Historical Geography*, *18*(2), 190-209.

Kirk, M. (2018). Light One Candle... Mary's Blog. The Role of the Catholic Pastoral Worker. http://marybkirk.com/?page_id=228#:~:text=The%20Parish%20Pastoral%20Worker%20works,Contributing%20to%20sacramental%20preparation%20programmes.

Ladies of the Grail (2026). History of the Grail https://www.grail-us.org/who-we-are/history-of-the-grail-in-the-us/

Learning and Work Institute, (L&W) (2024a). Making the Case for Life Long Learning https://learningandwork.org.uk/making-the-case-for-lifelong-learning/

Learning and Work Institute, (L&W) (2024b). Stark and growing inequalities in adult participation in learning revealed by national survey https://learningandwork.org.uk/stark-and-growing-inequalities-in-adult-participation-in-learning-revealed-by-national-survey/

Leavy, P. (Ed.). (2017). *Handbook of arts-based research*. New York: Guilford Publications.

Leeds Arts University (2026). Leeds Arts University Research Strategy 2023 to 2030 https://www.leeds-art.ac.uk/research/research-strategy

Lipman, M. (2003). *Thinking in education*. Cambridge university press.

lordslibrary.parliament.uk (2025). Lifelong Learning England's adult education sector https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/lifelong-learning-englands-adult-education-sector-and-the-governments-plan-for-skills/#:~:text=For%20courses%20beginning%20January%202027,government%20doing%20about%20lifelong%20learning?

Laal, M. (2012). Benefits of lifelong learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *46*, 4268-4272.

Marists (2026). Who Are the Marist Priests and Brothers https://www.societyofmaryusa.org/marist-vocation/who-are-the-marist-priest-and-brothers/

Norton, F. A. (2025). Three Lecturers, Three Universities, Three Countries: Can Facilitating Connecting Art Workshops in International Educational Contexts Create Connection and Criticality? In Mawson, K., Tyson, C. H., Perry, T., & Chen, J. I. H. (Eds.). (2025). *The BERA Guide to Practitioner Research: Developing Professional Knowledge in Educational Research and Practice*. Emerald Group Publishing. 61-70.

Norton, F. A. (2023). Developing critical thinking skills with adult-learners in an art school: might a critical thinking manifesto be one way to visualise findings?. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, *25*(2), 63-87.

Norton, F. A. (2022). *Thinking aloud & together: pedagogic stages in thinking, speaking, making and writing in Arts education* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sunderland).

McNiff, J. (2007). My story is my living educational theory. *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*, 308-329.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International journal of qualitative methods*, *16*(1), 1609406917733847.

Mellor, J. (2026a). Secrecy for seven ends as devolution budgets revealed. Newly-devolved adult skills regions digest DWP allocations and discuss plans. FE Week. https://feweek.co.uk/secrecy-for-seven-ends-as-devolution-budgets-revealed/#comments-section

Mellor J, (2026b). 'Fears of adult education desert amid cost-cut plans', *FE Week*, https://feweek.co.uk/fears-of-adult-education-desert-amid-cost-cut-plans/

Shahjahan, R. A. (2015). Being 'lazy'and slowing down: Toward decolonizing time, our body, and pedagogy. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *47*(5), 488-501.

Society for the Study of Human Biology SSHB (2026) Low- or Middle-Income Country (LMIC) https://www.sshb.org/lmic/

Tishman, S. (2017). *Slow looking: The art and practice of learning through observation*. London: Routledge.

United Nations (2026). Decade of Healthy Ageing https://www.decadeofhealthyageing.org/about/about-us/what-is-the-decade

Vygotsky, L.S. (2012). *Thought and language*. Translated by R. Hanfmann, G. Vakar and A. Kozulin. London: MIT Press.

White, M. (2024). Our Duty to Care for Our Elderly. *Crisis Magazine* https://crisismagazine.com/opinion/our-duty-to-care-for-our-elderly

Whittle, S. (2014). *A theory of Catholic education*. London: Bloomsbury. 1-256.

Wilcock, A. A. (1998). Reflections on doing, being and becoming. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *65*(5), 248-256.

Wong, K. L. Y., Smith, C., To-Miles, F., Dunn, S., Gregorio, M., Wong, L., ... & Hung, L. (2022). Timely considerations of using the de Jong Gierveld loneliness scale with older adults living in long-term care homes: a critical reflection. *Journal of Long-Term Care*.

World Health Organisation (WHO, 2026) Ageing and Health https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health

Wright, S. (2020). Thinking, doing and being decolonisation in, with and as place. In *The Routledge handbook of place* (pp. 208-217). Routledge.

Places for over 60s to learn

Bradford college has courses for adults (including, plumber, IT skills, maths and english)

Bristol Folk House LEARNING FOR PLEASURE SINCE 1920, Bristol. Arts and crafts.
https://www.bristolfolkhouse.co.uk/about-us/our-story

Halsway Manor Folk school. National Centre for Folk Arts, Quantok. Mostly music and dance some arts https://www.halswaymanor.org.uk/

Archipelago Folk School, Mull. Folk skill in boat building.
https://www.archipelagofolkschool.org/our-courses

Buster Ancient Farm Folk School. Traditional house building and associated crafts.
https://www.butserancientfarm.co.uk/about-us

Weald and Downland Living Museum and Folk School. Traditional 'lost' skills
https://www.wealddown.co.uk/courses/

Folk Schools in America: https://folkcraftrevival.com/suggested-resources/folkschools/

[Final versions of papers (no more than 5000 words including references) must be submitted by 1st of May 2026. Please use the APA (American Psychological Association) reference system. Send to klaus.buddeberg@uni-hamburg.de]

Andrew Opio (Texas State University)

Uganda's adult education policy agenda 2023/24-2027/28: The coalition, actors' beliefs, motives and influence on practices

There are concerns of narrow conception of adult education, lack of a comprehensive policy, limited political will, and funding in Uganda (Bananuka & Katahoire, 2019; Nuwagaba et al., 2024) like in other African countries (Abate, 2022; Biao, 2024; Tagoe & Abakah, 2024). In 2023 the government of Uganda passed the non-formal adult learning and community education strategy (NALCES) 2023/24-2027/28 that has established a national multi-ministerial and stakeholders' coalition for promote adult education. However, there is limited scholarly information about the coalition in addressing adult education policy and program issues. Using the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) (Sabatier & Weible, 2007) this study conducted a qualitative document analysis of NALCES exploring the coalition's agenda, characteristics, beliefs and motives of stakeholders involved and their actions on addressing adult education policy issues. Findings of thematic analysis indicate that the stakeholders have a joint focus on promoting adult education to accelerate national development agenda. Although the diverse stakeholders and their motives represent the broad scope of adult education, their actions are narrowly focused on adult education as literacy and non-formal adult education. There is consciousness in outrightly advancing the emancipatory and critical ideals of adult education. This study provides recommendations for adult education policy advocates in Uganda and developing countries on how government-led coalitions operate and possibilities of advancing emancipatory ethos of adult education within coalitions. This paper adds to the minuscule pool of research on adult education policy in Uganda and African perspectives in global adult education policy research.

Key words: adult education, policy, advocacy coalition, Uganda.

References

Abate, S.G. (2022). Analysis of the adult education policy initiatives in Ethiopia: Implications for policy reconsideration. *Education Research International.* https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/8334675

Bananuka, T.H., & Katahoire, A.R. (2019). The struggle for adult learning and education policy: A Ugandan experience. *Commonwealth of Learning.* https://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3440

Biao, I. (2024). Chapter 13: Adult learning and education policy within Francophone Africa. In M. Milana, P. Rasmussen & M. Bussi (Eds.), *Research Handbook on Adult Education Policy* (pp. 181-195). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803925950.00022

Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. (2023). *National non-formal adult learning and community education strategy for Uganda (NALCES) 2023/24-2027/28.* https://mglsd.go.ug/strategies

Nuwagaba, E.L., Kyebakola, C., & Garuzooka, J.F. (2024). An assessment of the enabling environment and institutional preparedness of the adult literacy learning system for Uganda: Implications for practice. In R, Morelan et al. (Eds.),*The Adult Learner 2024* (pp. 67-90).The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education. https://shorturl.at/4OO30

Sabatier, P. A., & Weible, C. M. (2007). The advocacy coalition framework. In P. A. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the Policy Process* (pp. 189–220). Westview Press

Tagoe, M. A., & Abakah, E. (2024). Chapter 23: Analysis of Ghana's adult learning and education policy environment and governance framework: Towards meeting the goal of lifelong learning for all. In M. Milana, P. Rasmussen & M. Bussi (Eds.), *Research Handbook on Adult Education Policy* (pp. 333-346). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803925950.00034

Hidden Faces of Illiteracy in Korea: A Mixed-Methods Study of Emerging Literacy Groups and Policy Implications

Park, Soyoun (Anyang University)

Heo, Joon (Yeongnam University)

Lee, Ji Hye (Hallym University)

Kwon, Yeil (Wichita State University)

Aims of the paper

This study aims to identify potential target groups for literacy education in Korea and to explore their learning needs in depth. Specifically, it analyzes the changing determinants of adult literacy levels over the past decade to uncover newly emerging groups with low literacy proficiency. By examining these groups' characteristics and literacy learning needs, the study seeks to provide empirical insights for developing more inclusive and adaptive literacy education policies in Korea.

Main perspective or theoretical/conceptual framework

In 2013, Korea developed a nationally contextualized literacy assessment tool that reflects both the linguistic features of the Korean language and the unique meanings of literacy within Korean society. This approach acknowledges that literacy should be understood not only through international comparisons but also within a country's sociocultural context. Since 2014, the Korean National Adult

Literacy Survey has been conducted every three years using this instrument, enabling systematic monitoring of national literacy levels and data-driven policy decisions. This framework assumes that literacy is dynamic—its definition and distribution evolve alongside social and technological transformations. Consequently, continuous identification of new target groups and the recalibration of policy focus are essential to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of national literacy policy.

Methods, research design, and type of study

The study employs a mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative analysis was conducted using data from four waves of the national adult literacy survey over ten years, involving descriptive statistics and decision tree analysis to determine the key factors differentiating literacy levels. Based on these findings, latent groups with potential literacy education needs were identified. Subsequently, focus group interviews were held with experts familiar with each target group to qualitatively explore the social contexts and learning demands of these populations. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to capture the lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations of the newly emerging low-literacy groups. The results of both analyses were then integrated to derive policy implications for Korean adult literacy education.

Data sources or evidence

The quantitative phase utilized a combined dataset comprising 28,616 samples from four survey rounds conducted between 2014 and 2023. The survey employed in-person household assessments and included direct tests of literacy proficiency as well as demographic, socioeconomic, and civic participation variables such as age, gender, education, income, employment, satisfaction with life, social interaction frequency, and political engagement. The qualitative phase drew upon five focus group discussions involving twelve experts, complemented by secondary analyses of social change data and policy documents to contextualize interpretations.

Results and/or conclusions

The results indicate that Korea's overall literacy proficiency has improved over the past decade. However, while age and gender were major determinants of literacy a decade ago, recent data reveal that household income, social participation, and civic engagement have become increasingly significant predictors. From these findings, four latent literacy education groups were identified: (1) youth with migrant backgrounds, (2) low-literate young adults, (3) socially isolated middle-aged individuals, and (4) incarcerated people. The qualitative analysis revealed that learners in these new literacy groups often exhibit limited life experiences, weak learning motivation, and restricted opportunities for experiential learning due to isolation from interpersonal networks. Many struggle to seek social support, and their most pressing learning needs lie in functional literacy for daily life and digital literacy for civic and occupational participation. Beyond these, they require opportunities to cultivate self-understanding and develop perspectives for engaging with the broader world.

Relevance to the field of policy studies in adult education

Based on the identified trends and characteristics of the newly emergent low-literacy groups, this study suggests future directions for Korea's literacy policy. Continuous support remains necessary for the traditional low-literacy population, yet literacy policies should now expand to address the needs of low-income and socially isolated groups. Programs must be both vertically and horizontally diversified to ensure that literacy education reaches these newly marginalized populations and fosters meaningful participation in personal, social, and civic life.

<Reference>

Heo, J., Lee, J., Park, S., Cho, H., & Ko, S. (2025). *Comprehensive analysis of the Korean adult literacy survey results* (Research Report No. FR 2025-2). National Institute for Lifelong Education.

Heo, J., Lee, J., Park, S., Kil, H., & Kim, J. (2024). Korean assessment of adult basic literacy: Instrument development. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714241279358

Ministry of Education & National Institute for Lifelong Education. (2024). *2023 Survey on adult literacy skills*. Ministry of Education & National Institute for Lifelong Education.

National Institute for Lifelong Education. (2014). *2014 Survey on adult literacy skills*. National Institute for Lifelong Education.

National Institute for Lifelong Education. (2017). *2017 Survey on adult literacy skills*. National Institute for Lifelong Education.

National Institute for Lifelong Education. (2020). *2020 Survey on adult literacy skills*. National Institute for Lifelong Education.

Park, S., & Kwon, Y. (2025). Changes in the determinants of adult literacy level: A decision tree-based comparative analysis of 2014 and 2023. *Journal of Lifelong Education, 31*(2), 39–65. https://doi.org/10.52758/kssle.2025.31.2.39

Park, S., Lee, J., & Heo, J. (2014). A study on the survey design of the domains and levels of literacy for developing adult literacy assessment items. *Journal of Lifelong Education Studies, 20*(3), 31–55.

Initial and continuing education of adult educators in Portugal: The impact of public policies on adult education

Catarina Paulos (UIDEF| Instituto Politécnico de Beja)

Adult education policies in Portugal are characterised by their fragmented and intermittent nature (Cavaco, 2022), as well as the prevalence of a programmed obscurantism involving Portuguese elites and decision-makers mentioned by Melo (2004). This has resulted in a series of advances and setbacks. Over the last three decades, adult education policy programmes based on European Union guidelines promoting lifelong learning have emerged. These programmes have given rise to new opportunities for adult education and training, as well as to adult educators who have implemented them (Barros, 2020). One such offering was the process of recognition of prior learning, which emerged in the early 2000s, along with the need for adult educators to implement it.

In the European context, the legal status of adult educators and their qualifications began to appear in official European Union documents in the early 2000s, and interest in this subject has been growing, culminating in the commissioning of two studies by the European Commission to map the situation of adult educators throughout Europe, including their education and competencies (Research voor Beleid, 2008, 2010). Despite some achievements and progress having been made (Nuissl et al., 2024), adult educators still have a low professional status and work in precarious conditions that are “often characterised by heterogeneous and atypical forms of employment” (Werner & Martin, 2023, p. 477).

This paper addresses the following research aims: a) to characterise the initial and continuing education of adult educators involved in the recognition of prior learning process; b) to evaluate the impact of adult education policies in Portugal over the last 20 years on the initial and continuing education of adult educators. Empirical data were derived from qualitative research involving biographical interviews with adult educators working on the recognition of prior learning with adults with a low level of schooling.

The research results reveal that, despite adult educators being highly qualified with a minimum academic qualification at bachelor's degree level, initial education in adult education is not a prerequisite for entering this professional field. Continuous education is heterogeneous, and when it exists, it takes the form of short-term courses and postgraduate programmes in various areas. Given these circumstances, the common continuous education process for adult educators stems from experiential training and reflection on experience gained from professional practice. Portuguese adult educators still occupy a fragile position without a well-defined professional status and are dependent on public policies influenced by various forces.

Keywords: adult educators; recognition of prior learning; initial and continuing education; adult education policies

References

Barros, R. (2020). The role of transnational bodies in lifelong learning and the politics of measurement - The promise and pitfalls of outcomes-based assessment into recognition of prior learning system in Portugal. In Finnegan F., Grummell B. (Eds.), *Power and*

possibility: Adult education in a diverse and complex world (pp. 53–63). Brill-Sense Publishers. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2gjwn4r.10

Cavaco, C. (2022). Políticas públicas de educação de adultos em Portugal – inovações e desafios [Public policies on adult education in Portugal – innovations and challenges]. *Educar em Revista, Curitiba, 38*, 1-22. http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0104-4060.82009

Melo, A. (2004). A ausência de uma política de educação de adultos como forma de controle social e alguns processos de resistência [The absence of an adult education policy as a form of social control and some processes of resistance]. *Fénix – Revista Pernambucana de Educação Popular e de Educação de Adultos*, *3*(3), 17-26.

Nuissl, E., Sava, S., & Farkas, É. (2024). Adult education in the European Union since 1993. *European Journal of Education*, *00*, e12719. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12719

Research voor Beleid (2008). *ALPINE—Adult learning professions in Europe A study of the current situation, trends and issues*. Final report. Research voor Beleid/PLATO.

Research voor Beleid. (2010). *Key competences for adult learning professionals*. Final report. Research voor Beleid/PLATO

Werner, K., & Martin, A. (2023). Between precarity and professionalism: The effect of uncertainty on adult educators' participation in continuing education. *Zeitschrift für Weiterbildungsforschung*, *46*, 475–493. https://doi.org/10.1007/

Teaching under Constraint: Exploring Adult Educators' Pedagogical Practices in Correctional Settings

Qiu, Kiki Maleika & Osman, Ali
Department of Education, Stockholm University

Note: This paper is a shortened version of a manuscript submitted to a journal.

Abstract
This article examines how adult educators approach and adapt their pedagogical practices in correctional settings. Semi-structured interviews with 14 teachers working in Swedish prisons were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and the theory of practice architecture. The findings show that prison-based education is not simply adult education delivered under constraint, but a distinct practice shaped by institutional rules, security routines, and students' diverse educational backgrounds, influencing how adult educators approach their teaching. Their prison pedagogy centers around establishing trust and is characterized by helping students internalize a sense of responsibility while fostering empowerment. In this way, adult education in correctional settings emerges as a relational and morally engaged practice, oriented towards students' future and holistic development.

Key words: prison education, correctional education, adult education, prison pedagogy, relational pedagogy, teaching

Introduction

In many Western democracies, adult education in correctional centers is perceived as a mechanism for the rehabilitation and reintegration of incarcerated individuals into society. There is a consensus among many Western democratic societies that the role and function of education in prison is to enable prisoners to acquire knowledge and skills that lead to an independent, law-abiding life and to improve their employment prospects (Behan, 2014; Bhatti, 2010; Bovill & Anderson, 2020; Brosens et al., 2020; Costelloe, 2003; Panitsides & Moussiou, 2019; Roth et al., 2017; Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006). Hence, policymakers use this role and function to argue for the importance of investing in education for incarcerated adults as a means to reduce recidivism, enhance public safety, and lower long-term public expenditure on welfare and criminal justice. International agreements and recommendations by supranational organizations such as the United Nations (2015), the Council of Europe (2006), and the Nordic Council of Ministers (2009) emphasize prisoners' right to education and highlight its role in promoting well-being, responsibility, agency, and holistic development.

Despite the documented benefits of education in prison for individuals and society, the field has become increasingly contested amid shifting political climates and ideologies. Debates concern not only its rehabilitative role but also the place of adult education and prisons as arenas for social justice. In Sweden, a more punitive approach has emerged, reflecting broader trends across Europe. Harsher criminal policies, including restricted parole, longer sentences, and increased imprisonment of young adults, have been introduced (Kriminalvården, 2023). At the same time, the scope and content of educational provisions have been reduced, as evidenced by the discontinuation of higher education opportunities in prisons (Kriminalvården, 2019, 2023). Adult education, traditionally grounded in free choice and self-directed learning, has increasingly been linked to prisons' sanctioning practices, as refusal to participate may now result in deferred parole (Kriminalvården, 2018).

The pedagogical approaches and practices of adult educators in correctional settings remain underexplored, despite their central role in rehabilitation. Adult educators are key actors in students' development, tasked with creating meaningful learning experiences in a highly regulated environment constrained by security considerations. Against this backdrop, this article examines how adult educators approach and adapt their teaching practices to address the challenges of prison-based education. The following research questions are addressed:

1. How do adult educators in correctional settings adapt their teaching practices to meet prisoners' learning needs and backgrounds?
2. How do adult educators relate to and interact with incarcerated students?
3. How does the institutional structure of prisons affect teaching practices?

Previous Research

The conditions that teachers encounter in prisons differ from those in educational settings outside prisons. Oftentimes they are described as challenging, emotionally demanding, or unsettling (Lindberg, 2005; Lukacova et al., 2018; Murphy, 2018; Patrie, 2023; Waite, 2024; Wright, 2005). Security regulations take precedence in such an environment and shape teaching practices, affecting how teachers interact and build trust with their students (Qiu, forthcoming).

Teachers are cautioned about prisoners' manipulative behavior, and are warned to maintain a distance and to set clear boundaries (Bhatti, 2010; Ferguson, 2023; Lindberg, 2005; Lukacova et al., 2018; Michals & Kessler, 2015; Patrie, 2023; Waite, 2024; Wright, 2004, 2005).

Beyond the relational aspect, several studies emphasize that teaching in prisons is constrained by the overarching logic of security and limited resources. Introducing new materials often requires approval from prison authorities and involves bureaucratic effort, sometimes encountering resistance from the administration (Ferguson, 2023; Lukacova et al., 2018; Murphy, 2018). In many prisons, only outdated textbooks, paper, blackboards, and overhead projectors are available (Lukacova et al., 2018; Murphy, 2018), and the prohibition of internet access further restricts instructional methods, forcing reliance on traditional teaching aids. Institutional routines, such as mid-course transfers, student absences due to other engagements, constant intake of new students, and lockdowns, further disrupt continuity and hinder the establishment of a stable learning environment (Ferguson, 2023; Murphy, 2018; Parkinson, 2018).

Another constraint identified in teaching in this context is that, compared to society at large, prisoners often have learning difficulties and limited prior study experience (Bhatti, 2010; Delaere et al., 2013; Halimi et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2013; Jurich et al., 2001; Kriminalvården, 2012, 2013, 2014; Skolinspektionen, 2012). Furthermore, students' motivation in correctional settings can be negatively affected by being mandated by prison authorities, or by emotional struggles with imprisonment and previous traumatic experiences (Ferguson, 2023; Lukacova et al., 2018; Parkinson, 2018). Teachers are therefore required to adapt their teaching styles and motivational strategies to support their students' learning in this unique setting (Jurich et al., 2001; Patrie, 2017). In previous studies, teachers have reported feeling unprepared in dealing with their students' heterogeneity and to teach in prison in general, as they had not received any prior training for teaching specifically in prisons (Bhatti, 2010; Jurich et al., 2001; Kamrath & Gregg, 2018; Lukacova et al., 2018; Patrie, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The theory of practice architecture (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2023; Kemmis et al., 2014) is applied to examine adult educators' teaching practices in correctional settings. Practices are understood not as individual actions but as historically situated and socially established arrangements of *sayings*, *doings*, and *relatings*. They are enabled and constrained by three interrelated arrangements: the *cultural-discursive arrangements* that shape language, ideas, and meaning through which practices are described, understood, and justified; the *material-economic arrangements*, which concern the physical, temporal, and technological conditions that shape what actions are possible; and the *social-political arrangements* that structure relationships and how power, authority, solidarity, and agency take form. Together, these are called *practice architecture* and form the conditions under which practices are reproduced and transformed. They are specific to the site where the practices take place, enabling and constraining specific ways of thinking, saying, doing, and relating. In this study, the dimensions are used to conceptualize prison-based education as a pedagogical practice located at the intersection of adult education ideals and the coercive logic of the correctional institution. Education in prison is thereby not only simply understood as adult education conducted in an unusual setting; rather, it is a distinct practice whose sayings, doings, and relatings are continuously shaped by security regimes, institutional hierarchies, and rehabilitative discourses. In this sense, education in prison emerges as a socially and

institutionally constituted practice rather than solely as the result of personal pedagogical choices.

By applying this theory we can analyze how humanistic educational discourses, such as trust, motivation, and adult responsibility, are articulated alongside discourses of control and surveillance; how pedagogical actions are shaped by material restrictions related to space, time, digital access, and security protocols; and how teacher-student relationships are negotiated within asymmetrical power relations.

Education in Swedish Prisons

This study focuses on the municipal adult education (*komvux*) provided at all 47 prisons in Sweden, which entails compulsory, upper-secondary, and vocational courses as well as Swedish for non-native speakers. It is steered by the same laws and ordinances as municipal adult education outside prisons is (Kriminalvården, 2018). In 2025, around 20% of prisoners had started courses, which corresponds to 3,841 individuals (Kriminalvården, 2026). Municipal adult education is provided through so-called learning centers, located on the prison's premises with teachers employed at the respective centers. As of October 2025, there were 165 teachers employed at the prisons' learning centers and 15 teachers employed at remand prisons. The number of teachers per learning center varies between one and 15, with an average of four teachers per prison (Statistisk support, Kriminalvården, personal communication, November 28, 2025).

Teaching in prison is not conducted in traditional classroom settings but rather as a self-study course, with teachers having weekly meetings or phone calls with their students for about 30 minutes. The teachers thereby work as subject teachers both with students who are physically located at their learning center and with other students in distance mode. In addition, teachers act as tutors, providing support to the students at their learning center who have their subject teacher at another learning center.

Methodology

Contact with the teachers was established through the heads of school within the Prison and Probation Service. The final sample consists of 14 teachers: 10 at a prison for men, one at a prison for women, one at a remand prison, one at both a regular prison and a remand prison, and one special education teacher (*specialpedagog*), who does not teach students but provides support to other teachers across different prisons to identify appropriate learning support. The semi-structured interviews focused on the teachers' experiences of working in correctional settings and were conducted between May 2024 and December 2024, either in person or remotely. They lasted an average of around one hour and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In order to maintain anonymity, some of the information on the teachers in Table 1 was excluded respectively altered.

Table 1. Overview of the interview participants

Name (age)	Years in latest position(s)	Security class
Anneli (50+)	1-2	Low
Marina (40+)	3-5	
Anders (60+)	15+	
Bengt (60+)	1-2	Medium
Ingrid (60+)	1-2	
Linda (50+)	1-2	
Julia (30+)	3-5	
Fredrik (40+)	3-5	
Sandra (40+)	3-5	
Marcus (30+)	6-10	
Eva (50+)	15+	
Johanna (40+)	3-5	High
Lena (60+)	6-10	
Amanda (40+)	15+	

All transcripts were read repeatedly, and parts related to teaching practices were extracted.[1] The analysis of the interview excerpts was inspired by qualitative content analysis as described by Elo and Kyngäs (2008), which includes coding, categorization, and abstraction. Preliminary themes related to key teaching dimensions such as pedagogy, motivational strategies, technology use, institutional structure, student support, and adaptability were generated by analyzing the first five interviews. This was used to guide further analysis and to understand how the correctional setting shapes teaching practices. As a next step, all interviews were coded with the help of the software NVivo. The categories were further refined, and new categories were created (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Results

The theory of practice architecture was applied to the categories in order to examine the challenges and possibilities that shape adult educators' teaching practices in correctional settings. In the following, the empirical results are presented as pedagogical sayings, pedagogical doings, and pedagogical relatings.

Pedagogical *sayings*

In the interviews with the teachers, education in prison is frequently framed as relational, and supporting student learning is closely tied to the ability to establish relationships, as exemplified in the following accounts:

[1] This article is part of a larger research project on education in prison; other parts of the interviews are published in separate publications (see Qiu, forthcoming).

That you work with the relationship. That they trust you. You have to work with the relationship all the time. (Lena)

And I would argue that this personal communication is the key to success. (Anneli)

The repeated emphasis on relationships and personal communication as being key reflects a discourse in which teaching practices are understood primarily as personal, relational work rather than solely the transmission of subject knowledge. Building trust becomes crucial due to the students' limited educational background and negative earlier school experiences. The teachers frame difficulties and mistakes as natural parts in the process of learning in order to mitigate feelings of frustration and the fear of failing.

Throughout the interviews the teachers link education in prison to adult education discourses, affecting how they speak about themselves and their roles. Anders describes his pedagogical role as "a combination of everything", emphasizing that his task extends beyond subject content to strengthening students "as human beings". The focus on the development of the whole person is also stressed among other teachers:

It's about you getting better and better at handling your situation on your own. And these are capabilities that you can use in your daily life too. It's not only about school. It'll be useful in your family life and work life too. (Bengt)

We can provide Bildung in a different way and help them develop critical thinking and to think about who they are as individuals […] That's extra important with our target group because they…it's so interesting because they haven't reflected much on things like that. (Marcus)

Education in prison is closely linked to the values of adult education, such as Bildung, critical thinking, and leading an independent life. Fostering these values in students is especially important for those who are in correctional settings, as pointed out by Marcus, reflecting the discourse around prisoners' lacking prerequisites and the prison as a place for rehabilitation. The future-orientated framing of education is also apparent in Sandra's account, in which she stresses that prisoners "need a goal" and that "we humans [don't] function without a goal". This language reflects a central assumption in adult education: that learning must be perceived as meaningful and future-oriented to be sustained.

In addition, the students' own responsibility for their learning is emphasized in line with adult education discourses, as is evident in one of Bengt's quotes: "It requires work from you too. No one's going to hand it to you on a silver platter." The demand to take responsibility is communicated to the students by Sandra as well:

Don't bother us. Don't be difficult. I say: I don't have patience with children and teenagers; that's why I left school. Here it's adult education, so we behave like adults. (Sandra)

In Sandra's quote, we can see that she distinguishes education in prison from traditional school, using straightforward language to highlight the students' own responsibility and the need to behave. In addition, eliciting the desired behavior is not only linked to adult education discourse but to disciplinary discourses within correctional settings. Teachers refer to the carrot-and-stick approach and the fact that breaches of rules can be punished with suspension from the learning center, as well as incident reports that can affect students' possibility for parole. Other custodial and security-oriented discourses that frame teaching practices are also present. The teachers repeatedly refer to a "security mindset" (Amanda), "security risks" (Johanna), and the need to "be aware of what's going on around you" (Linda, Sandra). The emphasis on strictly adhering to the rules is emphasized throughout the interviews. Fredrik says:

But just this thing that from a security perspective you can't miss anything, and that you yourself have to accept that there are some prison rules that must be followed. (Fredrik)

Missing something can become a security threat, and there are some things "you just need to know" (Lena), reflecting how questioning or violating prison rules, even by accident, is unacceptable and unthinkable in a correctional setting.

Pedagogical *doings*

The teachers describe how this highly regulated material environment shapes their *doings*. These arrangements both facilitate supporting their students' learning and make it more difficult. This can be seen in security arrangements that emerge as defining material conditions. Anders explains: "We don't have internet […] security comes first". The classroom is limited to a closed intranet system and teaching relies heavily on books, pens, printed materials, and carefully curated offline content, which increases the teachers' administrative workload. At the same time, several teachers noted that students are less distracted due to the lack of internet access and how "absolutely perfect" (Anneli) and "luxurious" (Marcus) these conditions are.

Local conditions at prisons across the country can differ and Bengt shares that "some places are super nice. They're quite newly built, [while] others are almost total disasters." This shapes the teachers' doings and their possibilities to provide support as one "has significantly less insight into the existing conditions and what rules apply at other learning centers" (Julia).

As education in Swedish prisons is organized in one-on-one teaching with individual meetings each week, it enables the teachers to provide highly individualized instruction, which Lena describes as "luxurious". Working in correctional settings allows the teachers to work in a more coach-like manner, "because everything's built around the individual meeting" (Linda). The teachers shared how they get to know their students "on a much deeper level than […] in a municipal adult education class outside prison, [where] it's more on the surface level" (Anneli). Several teachers emphasize the time they have for each student:

I think we have time in a different way than you do in school. (Lena)

The time and attention, so to speak, that we can give each student here is something that's missing in compulsory school on the outside. (Johanna)

The available time enables doings positioned within a tradition of guidance, individualization, and lifelong learning, rather than formal schooling. This makes it possible for the teachers to "see every single individual" (Linda), to "tailor the studies to each individual" (Anneli), and to "make these small adaptations with the teaching material and try out different approaches" (Johanna).

Pedagogical *relatings*

The importance of trustful yet clearly bounded relationships with incarcerated students are emphasized by the teachers. They stress the need to "really show that we care about [them]" (Eva) and "go the extra mile" (Sandra). They highlight that it is crucial to show empathy and compassion for their students' situation as imprisoned individuals:

To be understanding, because sometimes they've received bad news and they have problems with their family, or they just can't take it anymore sitting here. (Marina)

They're humans, even if they're in prison now and are convicted of crimes […] they have feelings too and the need to talk sometimes […] there, you can be a fellow human being and can listen to and talk with them sometimes. (Johanna)

As the students struggle with various hardships, the teachers also emphasize humor as "a super important resource" (Anneli) in their teaching and say they "joke around a lot, because they need it. They feel down" (Sandra). These more open, relaxed relationships are also sustained by several teachers who choose not to read about their students' convictions, as "for me it doesn't matter at all what they're convicted of" (Linda). This enables teachers to treat their students as students rather than criminals, and allows them to "think about the pedagogical [aspect]" (Lena).

The relationships between teachers and prisoners differ from those between prison officers and prisoners. However, relational practices between teachers and students are nonetheless tightly regulated by prison rules and security considerations. Several teachers point out the need to "keep a bit of distance" (Julia, Johanna) to their students and to be "personal but not private" (Johanna, Anneli, Julia, Linda) when interacting with them. This rule is applicable to teachers working outside prisons as well, but gains importance in correctional settings:

For a teacher outside prison it's more from a pedagogical perspective. Here it's a question of security. (Linda)

You should think very carefully about what to talk about with the prisoners in here and what not to, in a way that maybe you don't have to be as vigilant about outside prison. (Julia)

Staying vigilant is necessary as the students, although they are "super nice, do have other capacities" (Ingrid); and, as pointed out by several teachers, attempts at manipulation are not uncommon. This requires the ability to set clear boundaries and to enforce rules. The teachers stress that one "has to be consistent" (Sandra), and the need for zero tolerance regarding student misbehavior at the learning center is evident across the interviews:

This isn't a playground. Are you [the prisoner] ready to follow all the rules? Because otherwise you're going to have problems. (Sandra)

They know we're not going to allow this, and when we don't allow it they know not to insist because otherwise they're getting an incident report, period. (Marina)

Violating rules inevitably leads to consequences and incident reports, reflecting the logic of incentives and sanctions in which order is enforced through institutional power rather than pedagogical choices alone. At the same time, as seen above, trust and softer approaches are also necessary as teachers need to "say no but still maintain the relationship" (Ingrid), reflecting the centrality of relations in prison pedagogy.

Anders also illustrates how communication shifts depending on the prison's security class:

Here [at the low-security prison] I can be more like myself, so to say. There [at the high-security prison] you have to weigh your words all the time. How should I approach that person? What can I say to that person? (Anders)

Avoiding triggering students is also mentioned by several other teachers, such as Anneli, who adopts a low-affective behavior, and Sandra, who times her negative feedback on education-related matters to moments when a student is not already upset due to a negative decision from the prison administration. Sandra calls this her "safety", illustrating how teachers are embedded in broader relational networks within the prison institution whereby knowledge about a

student's life in prison becomes important not only for educational purposes but also from a safety perspective.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored how adult educators at Swedish correctional facilities approach and adapt their practices in an environment characterized by security protocols, institutional routines, and students' diverse educational backgrounds. Using the theory of practice architecture, the findings reveal that prison-based education is not simply adult education delivered under constraint but rather a unique practice that emerges from the complex interplay of the prison's cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements. These factors influence what teachers can think, say, and do, as well as how they connect with their students, creating a pedagogical approach that is deeply relational, personal, and ethical.

A key finding was the emphasis on building trust and engaging relationally with students. In this context, educators' approaches in prison reflect that teaching is not just about imparting knowledge but also about relationships. Teachers needed to employ empathy, humor, and emotional understanding to foster a supportive learning environment. These relational characteristics in their teaching approach can be understood as efforts to navigate and mitigate students' institutional distrust and emotional struggles, reflecting other research highlighting the emotional labor involved in teaching incarcerated students (Bhatti, 2010; Lindberg, 2005; Lukacova et al., 2018; Patrie, 2017; Wright, 2004). The nurturing relationships, however, were consistently governed by professional boundaries, institutional rules, and constant vigilance. This resonates with findings from other research that emphasized the importance of maintaining clear emotional and interpersonal boundaries to prevent overinvolvement and manipulation (Bhatti, 2010; Michals & Kessler, 2015; Patrie, 2023; Wright, 2004, 2005). The teachers in this study viewed boundary maintenance as integral to their teaching identity rather than as an extension of prison discipline. This highlights a hybrid relational stance in prison pedagogy: balancing emotional availability with professional detachment and combining care with an unwavering commitment to security and consistency.

In this study, the teachers discussed negotiating contradictions between adult education ideals and the coercive features of imprisonment. Their approaches draw from adult education traditions, which emphasize autonomy, responsibility, personal growth, and meaningful learning. Yet, this coexisted with discourses of compliance, safety, and control similar to those described in Lindberg (2005) and Wright (2005). Such contradictions further highlight the fundamental hybridity of prison pedagogy: simultaneously oriented toward empowerment and discipline. The theory of practice architecture helps illuminate how the teachers draw on both adult education sayings and institutional language when it comes to motivating their students, fostering responsibility, and maintaining order.

Material constraints that teachers face were highlighted in this study, mirroring challenges identified in other international studies (Ferguson, 2023; Flores & Barahona-Lopez, 2020; Lukacova et al., 2018; Murphy, 2018). The individualized one-on-one teaching in Swedish prisons emerges as a product of material-economic arrangements that makes it possible for teachers to adapt study pace, modify content, and tailor their feedback, but more importantly, to provide individualized emotional support, build trust, and set meaningful goals. This is crucial in the prison context due to the incarcerated students' experiences of school failures and

their heterogeneous learning needs, as described in other research (Flores & Barahona-Lopez, 2020; Lukacova et al., 2018; Murphy, 2018).

Together, the findings here show how prison pedagogy in Sweden centers around relational elements and how it emerges from the dynamic interplay of sayings, doings, and relatings, as well as how these practices are sustained, challenged, and transformed within a coercive institutional landscape.

References

Behan, C. (2014). Learning to Escape: Prison Education, Rehabilitation and the Potential for Transformation. *Journal of Prison Education & Reentry*, *1*(1), 20–31. https://doi.org/10.25771/8039

Bhatti, G. (2010). Learning behind bars: Education in prisons. *Teaching and Teacher Education, Anthropological Perspectives on Learning and Teaching: Legitimate Peripheral Participation Revisited*, *26*(1), 31–36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.06.020

Bovill, M., & Anderson, C. (2020). Changing the Subject: A Community of Philosophical Inquiry in Prisons. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, *11*(2), 183–198. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.ojs981

Brosens, D., Croux, F., Claes, B., Vandevelde, S., & De Donder, L. (2020). An Organizational Analysis of Foreign National Prisoners' Participation Possibilities in Flanders (Belgium). *Journal of Prison Education Reentry*, *6*(2), 144–161. https://doi.org/10.25771/mh4f-0996

Costelloe, A. (2003). *Third level education in Irish prisons: Who participates and why?* https://oro.open.ac.uk/63999/1/27532740.pdf

Council of Europe. (2006). *European Prison Rules*. Council of Europe Publishing.

Delaere, G., De Caluwé, S., & Clarebout, G. (2013). Prison Education and Breaking Through the Walls in Flanders: The Motivational Orientations of Long-Term Prisoners. *Journal of Correctional Education (1974-)*, *64*(3), 2–21. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26508104

Eikeland, O. J., Manger, T., & Asbjørnsen, A. (Eds.). (2009). *Education in Nordic Prisons. Prisoners' Educational Backgrounds, Preferences and Motivation*. Nordic Council of Ministers.

Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *62*(1), 107–115. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x

Ferguson, C. (2023). Teaching in Prison: An Autoethnographic Account of One Educator's Experiences. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *74*(3), 3–20. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48756313

Flores, J., & Barahona-Lopez, K. (2020). "I am in a constant struggle:" The challenges of providing instruction to incarcerated youth in southern California. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *76*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2020.102192

Grootenboer, P., & Edwards-Groves, C. (2023). *The Theory of Practice Architectures. Researching Practices*. SpringerBriefs in Education.

Halimi, M., Brosens, D., De Donder, L., & Engels, N. (2017). Learning during Imprisonment: Prisoners' Motives to Educational Participation within a Remand Prison in Belgium. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *68*(1), 3–31. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26508015

Jones, L. Ø., Manger, T., Eikeland, O.-J., & Asbjørnsen, A. (2013). Participation in Prison Education: Is it a Question of Reading and Writing Self-Efficacy Rather than Actual Skills? *Journal of Correctional Education*, *64*(2), 41–62. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26508099

Jurich, S., Casper, M., & Hull, K. A. (2001). Training Correctional Educators: A Needs Assessment Study. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *52*(1), 23–27. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23294030

Kamrath, B., & Gregg, J. (2018). Escaping the Prison Classroom: A Case Study of Correctional Teacher Turnover and Retention. *Journal of Correctional Education (1974-)*, *69*(2), 59–71. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26508064

Kemmis, S., Wilkinson, J., Edwards-Groves, C., Hardy, I., Grootenboer, P., & Bristol, L. (2014). *Changing Practices, Changing Education*. Springer Science+Business Media.

Kriminalvården. (2012). *Årsredovisning 2011*.

Kriminalvården. (2013). *Årsredovisning 2012*.

Kriminalvården. (2014). *Klientkartläggning 2013—Ett regeringsuppdrag. En presentation av bakgrundsfaktorer hos Kriminalvårdens klienter*. https://www.kriminalvarden.se/om-kriminalvarden/publikationer/analys-och-statistik/klientkartlaggning-2013/

Kriminalvården. (2018). *Kriminalvårdens handbok för vuxenutbildning (2018:14)*.

Kriminalvården. (2019). *Beslut avseende avveckling av högskolestudier i anstalt (KV 2019-23133)*.

Kriminalvården. (2023). *Kriminalvårdens kapacitetsbehov till följd av Tidöavtalet*.

Kriminalvården. (2026). *Årsredovisning 2025*.

Lindberg, O. (2005). Prison cultures and social representations. The case of Hinseberg, a women's prison in Sweden. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, *1*(2–4), 143–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449200600553076

Lukacova, S., Lukac, M., Lukac, E., Pirohova, I., & Hartmannova, L. (2018). Prison Education in Slovakia from the Teacher's Perspective. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, *5*(1), 63–79. https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/jper/vol5/iss1/5/

Michals, I., & Kessler, S. (2015). Prison Teachers and Their Students: A Circle of Satisfaction and Gain. *Journal of Correctional Education (1974-)*, *66*(3), 47–62. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26508011

Murphy, K. M. (2018). Should I Stay or Should I Go? Teachers' Commitment to Their Work in Juvenile Corrections Schools. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *69*(1), 4–29. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26508038

Panitsides, E. A., & Moussiou, E. (2019). What does it take to motivate inmates to participate in prison education? An exploratory study in a Greek prison. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, *25*(2), 157–177. https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714198406

Parkinson, J. G. (2018). Did that really happen? The marginalising of fiction in the prison education classroom. *The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, *23*(4), 539–547.

Patrie, N. (2017). Learning to be a Prison Educator. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, *4*(1), 17–24. http://dx.doi.org/10.15845/jper.v4i1.1045

Patrie, N. (2023). Teaching in an unfamiliar place: A mixed methods-grounded theory study on the experiences of new correctional educators. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, *7*(3), 290–309. https://doi.org/10.25771/dee8-x383

Roth, B. B., Westrheim, K., Jones, L., & Manger, T. (2017). Academic Self-Efficacy, Educational Motives and Aspects of the Prison Sentence as Predictors for Participation in Prison Education. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *68*(3), 19–40. http://dx.doi.org/10.15845/jper.v3i2.1040

Skolinspektionen. (2012). *Vuxenutbildning i anstalt. En kvalitetsgranskning av Kriminalvårdens klientutbildning med fokus på motivationsarbete och anpassning*. Skolinspektionen. https://www.skolinspektionen.se/beslut-rapporter-statistik/publikationer/kvalitetsgranskning/2012/vuxenutbildning-i-anstalt/

Tewksbury, R., & Stengel, K. M. (2006). Assessing Correctional Education Programs: The Students' Perspective. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *57*(1), 13–25. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23282685

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2015). *The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)*.

Waite, S. (2024). Mapping the Landscape of Trust: Towards a Typology in the Context of the Prison. *Prison Service Journal*, (275), 3–8. https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/default/files/u223/PSJ%20275%2C%20trust%20in%20prison.pdf

Wright, R. (2004). Care as the "Heart" of Prison Teaching. *Journal of Correctional Education (1974-)*, *55*(3), 191–209. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23292135

Wright, R. (2005). Going to Teach in Prisons: Culture Shock. *Journal of Correctional Education*, *56*(1), 19–38. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23282781

How do ALE and VET policies construct learning in the EU?

Xavier Rambla

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain)

Keywords

Education policy; life course research; policy instruments; sociology of quantification

Introduction

The paper will contribute to the wider conversation on policy shifts and the liberal narrative of adult education.

It will draw on the findings of two research projects that examine the social construction of learning of the population above 18 in Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain (https://clear-horizon.eu/), and the uses of labour market information in Barcelona, Sofia and Vienna (https://aivetproject.eu/).

Theoretical framework

Both vocational and adult education institutional arrangements can be interpreted as social fields where diverse actors intervene drawing on uneven resource sets and elaborating diverse conventions about the main issues at stake (Bourdieu, 1993). Remarkably, the key features of social fields are visible in the skills development level of vocational education systems (Pilz, 2016) and the varied institutional configurations of adult education systems (Desjardins and Ioannidou, 2020).

The concepts of life course, intersectional inequalities, policy instruments and the sociology of quantification portray the key features of the relevant social fields.

At a given moment in their life course, adult students have taken different institutional itineraries. While they are involved in formal education and training, they must balance education, work and personal life amid intersectional class, gender and ethnic inequalities. Particularly, many young adults feel personally responsible for their transition from childhood to adult life. Young people frame their prospective learning within an active exploration of their sense of belonging to the places where they live, study and find their first jobs (Farrugia, 2020). For them, it is crucial to determine whether their life projects align with the prevailing image of various places, be it cities, de-industrialised regions, or remote rural areas (Cuzzocrea, 2018).

Policy instruments are tools of governance that embed technical knowledge in certain sets of social relations (Le Galès, 2016). In the EU, an array of legal recommendations, yearly budget agreements and statistical indicators regulate the interactions between adult educators and students. The European Union, the member states, many cities and regions, and most local authorities attempt to guarantee that all the youth achieve certain basic learning outcomes. For the last decade, the European institutions have coordinated the relevant policies and the main authorities by means of yearly country-specific recommendations that the member states must take into consideration when running the national budget. These recommendations often link education and training to employment targets and policies regarding skills development. This is one of the reasons why the bulk of

lifelong learning policies that target young adults in the European Union are centred on employment.

The sociology of quantification has noted that measurement depends on social conventions and technical infrastructures (Desrosières, 2009). The current metrics of learning rely on the assumption that learning outcomes, professional qualifications and job descriptions are aligned. These metrics need information produced by responses to official surveys and data generated by professional social media.

The analysis will address the following research question:

> How do decision-makers, educators and adult students understand learning in different European cities and regions?

Students perceive their own learning through the lens of their life plans, which are significantly conditioned by intersectional inequalities. Policy instruments such as the Council recommendations convey the message that academic achievement and individual progress are the priority and constitute equivalent outcomes for learners. A second intervening instrument is the set of yearly budget recommendations, in which the Commission and the member states generally agree that education and training policies will foster competitiveness and enhance the digital and green transitions. Official indicators are a third instrument that induces member states, cities and regions to emulate the policy of their counterparts who attain the higher scores. Finally, the sociology of quantification reveals that the underlying information about learning outcomes hinges on undefined conventions and depends on siloed infrastructures.

Methodology

My argument attempts to synthesise the findings that have emerged from the following analyses.

- Gray literature reviews of documents on learning outcomes in sixteen EU regions.
- Comparative descriptions of the available databases in Barcelona, Sofia and Vienna.
- Delphi polls of local experts' opinions in Barcelona, Sofia and Vienna.
- Interviews with educators and disadvantaged students in sixteen regions.
- Interviews with employers and VET graduates in Barcelona, Sofia and Vienna (ongoing fieldwork until early 2026).

These analyses draw on a qualitative, descriptive and phenomenological research design. Several research teams have interviewed purposive samples of educators, VET graduates and employers in four VET specialties (energy, health, hospitality, IT). So far, I can report on a content analysis of the interviews, but in 2026 and 2027 I will double check these conclusions with a discourse analysis that traces the meaning of the main policy catchwords through the social and intertextual relationships between policymakers (and official documents), educators' perspectives and students' self-reflective accounts.

Discussion

Four findings are emerging from the ongoing analysis.

Firstly, experts adopt an undifferentiated, space-blind view of learning in the heterogeneous regions of the EU. Several rounds of interviews have identified a shared construal that

projects the same measures to all regions and localities, particularly regarding employment. While public employment services officers generally adhere to this view, however, internship coordinators and employers qualify some of its assumptions.

Secondly, the prevailing classifications of learning outcomes frame achievement as a social elevator, while turning guidance into a rhetorical devise for legitimising social hierarchies. The grey literature and the opinions of most experts portray a hierarchy within which individual progress is not likely to be so smooth as expected.

Thirdly, employers' and graduates' mainstream understandings of official classifications rely on over-generalisations about soft skills. ISCED levels and qualifications frameworks are often read in this vein, although eventually skills are only effective in certain contexts.

And fourthly, the stakeholders of education and training remain uncertain about the use of the available quantitative information. Big Tech companies promise that rapid analyses of online job advertisements will provide fine-grained intelligence, but the comparability of descriptions cannot be taken for granted across countries. These sources cannot capture local landscapes of education and training programmes and employment opportunities.

Conclusions

Vocational and adult education policies contribute to shape the life course of people and measurement activities attempt to account for the whole process. These policies are mead in social fields where heterogeneous stakeholders meet. But little is known about the perspectives that these stakeholders develop while engaged in these activities.

An initial reading of grey literature and interviews identifies several issues emerging from the involvement of heterogeneous policy actors in skills development and adult learning systems. Besides learners and educators, employers, public employment service officers and Big Tech companies participate in these processes.

A tentative selection of evidence identifies several biases of mainstream expert views of vocational and adult education. For instance, the prevailing opinions privilege undifferentiated understandings of the local contexts of education and training. Official classifications are normally interpreted as social elevators that operate through individualised skills. The promises of enhanced technological capacity entail new fiscal costs and raise new concerns with skills intelligence.

The observation of divergent albeit connected perspectives strongly suggests that adult and vocational education policy making would greatly benefit from adopting decision methods inspired on deliberative democracy. But the paper cannot elaborate on this conclusion at this point.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *La misère du monde*. Editions du Seuil.

Cuzzocrea, V. (2018). 'Rooted mobilities' in young people's narratives of the future: A peripheral case. Current Sociology, 66(7), 1106–1123.

Desjardins, R., & Ioannidou, A. (2020). The political economy of adult learning systems—some institutional features that promote adult learning participation. *Zeitschrift Für Weiterbildungsforschung*, *43*(2), 143–168. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40955-020-00159-y

Desrosières, A. (2009). How to be real and conventional: A discussion of the quality criteria of official statistics. *Minerva*, *47*(3), 307–322. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-009-9125-3

Farrugia, D. (2020). Class, place and mobility beyond the global city: stigmatisation and the cosmopolitanisation of the local. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(2), 237–251.

le Galès, P. (2016). Performance measurement as a policy instrument. *Policy Studies*, *37*(6), 508–520. https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2016.1213803

Pilz, Matthias (2016) "Typologies in Comparative Vocational Education: Existing Models and a New Approach" *Vocations and Learning*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 295–314. DOI: 10.1007/s12186-016-9154-7

Widening Women's Scope of Action: Citizenship Education through Home Economics

Annette Rasmussen & Karen E. Andreasen

Keywords: Citizenship Education; Home Economics, History of Education

In the Nordic countries, the development of the modern nation state as a constitutional democracy was accompanied by educational efforts to build and strengthen national identities in the populations. Such efforts took place both by means of establishing comprehensive school systems and by means of the folk high schools (Fejes et al., 2018; Hall & Korsgaard, 2015; Lövgren & Nordvall, 2017). Drawing on the philosophy of Grundtvig, the folk high schools were to become the breeding ground for a popular culture that could be considered a 'bottom-up' version of Danish citizenship education, an education from below (Korsgaard & Wiborg, 2006; Jenkins, 2012; Rasmussen, 2023). The fundamental idea of the folk high school was to establish a 'school for life' centred around the idea that the 'living word' should stimulate and enlighten young adults in rural areas and transform them from inarticulate masses into enlightened and articulate citizens, capable of taking active part in a democratized society.

Parallel to the folk high school movement, the field of home economics developed as an educational movement. This was reflected in the founding of home economics associations and home economics schools, teacher training colleges, other forms of educational provision, and knowledge contexts shared by women of all ages and social origin but especially targeting women from the farming communities of rural Denmark. The movement thus involved and argued from different interest positions which included the farmers' associations, the smallholders' associations, the women's associations, and the maids' association (Andreasen & Rasmussen, 2022; Rasmussen & Andreasen, 2024). From their different positions, the stakeholders aimed at 1) strengthening the *role of housewives* in order to secure the family as a social unit, 2) strengthening households as a profession and *social matter*, both in terms of raising its professional status and of safeguarding public health, 3) strengthening *women's political citizenship* through the right to vote and *rights in the state* and 4) to emphasise the associated *duty to be part of a national emergency preparedness* (Andreasen & Rasmussen, forthcoming).

Our paper aims at understanding from participants' perspectives how such policy educational efforts influenced their lives in the above directions, i.e. towards professions, housekeeping, and association activities as well as supporting the community among them. The empirical sources for an analysis of this include group journals written by women and constituting a relatively unexplored source in research (Mortensen, 2003; Rasmussen & Andreasen, 2025), including research in adult

education. The seven women writers of the group journals had participated in a home economics education in 1945 and afterwards formed a group and initiated correspondence on this, which lasted for abt. 50 years and resulted in two such group journals.

Methodologically, we will approach the analysis of the journal entries from a combined post-structural and narrative analytical perspective. The narrative approach relates to an interest in people's life stories and how these can contribute to the exploration of identities and social positioning, as well as the relationship between such micro-level narratives and societal-level narratives and processes (Foucault, 2001; Phoenix, 2013; 2016).

References

Andreasen, K. E. & Rasmussen, A. (forthcoming). Husholdningsuddannelse og kvinders medborgerskab. Dansk Kvindesamfunds argumentation for udbredelsen af husholdningsuddannelse. In: Edited volume celebrating the anniversary of the Danish Women's Society (in press)

Andreasen, K. E. & Rasmussen, A. (2022). The Development of Home Economics as a Field of Knowledge and its Contribution to the Education and Social Status of Women. *Nordic Journal of Educational History* Vol. 9, no. 2 (2022), pp. 63–84

Fejes, A., Dahlstedt, M., Olson, M., & Sandberg, F. (2018). *Adult education and the formation of citizens. A critical interrogation*. Routledge.

Foucault, M. (2001). *Madness and civilization*. Routledge.

Hall, J. A., & Korsgaard, O. (2015). Introduction. In J. A. Hall, O. Korsgaard, & O. K. Pedersen (Eds.), *Building the nation: N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish national identity* (pp. 3–26). McGill-Queen's University Press.

Jenkins, R. (2012). *Being Danish. Paradoxes of identity in everyday life*. Museum Tusculanum Press.

Korsgaard, O., & Wiborg, S. (2006). Grundtvig—the key to Danish education? *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 50(3), 361–382. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313830600743381

Lövgren, J., & Nordvall, H. (2017). A short introduction to research on the Nordic folk high schools. *Nordic Studies in Education*, 37(2), 61–66. https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1891-5949-2017-02-01

Mortensen, M. (2006). "De smaa graa". Livshistorier – vandrebøger [”The little grey ones". Life histories – group journals]. *Forum for Idræt, 22*(1) https://doi.org/10.7146/ffi.v22i0.31678

Phoenix, A. (2013). Analysing narrative contexts. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (2nd ed., pp. 72–87). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402271

Phoenix, A. (2016). Narrativ praksis og identitetskonstruktioner. In G. Bo, A-D. Christensen, & T. L. Thomsen (Eds.), *Narrativ forskning: Tilgange og metoder* (pp. 13–35). Hans Reitzels Forlag

Rasmussen, A. (2023) Imagining and building the nation through citizenship education: an interculturalist perspective on the case of Denmark. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 23:3, 268-279, DOI: 10.1080/14708477.2023.2187058

Rasmussen, A. & Andreasen, K. E. (2024). Networks on Home Economics in Early 1900s' Scandidania and their discourses of being a good woman. In D. Raftery & S. Spencer (eds.). *Intersectionality, Transnationalism, and the History of Education. Networks, Time, and Place*. (pp. 149-175). Palgrave Macmillan.

Rasmussen, A. & Andreasen, K. E. (2025): ”Husholdningsskolers betydning for kvinders videre uddannelse og beskæftigelse i efterkrigstidens Danmark”. *Uddannelseshistorie*, 58, 2025, 63-88.

Abstract for 2026 ESREA policy studies conference

Julius Bomholt, Social Democracy and Danish Adult Education

Palle Rasmussen
Aalborg University, Denmark

Keywords: folk high school; labour movement; cultural democracy; popular enlightenment; welfare state

The aim of the paper is to document and discuss how a key political actor contributed to shaping the Danish tradition and policy of adult education in the decades before and after the Second World War.

Julius Bomholt (1896-1969) was a Danish politician, intellectual and educator. During a long and active life, he had a key role in developing and implementing the profile and policies of the Danish Social Democratic party in the fields of education and culture. The aim of this paper is to highlight his ideas about learning and culture, his policy interventions related to adult education and more generally his contributions to the development of Danish adult education.

Bomholt grew up in the western part of Denmark. Born in a working-class family, Bomholt connected from an early age to the Social Democrats. He took a higher education degree in theology but went on to work in teaching. At the age og 28 he became head of a worker's folk high school and involved himself in developing a socialist perspective on culture and literature. An important outcome of this was the book "Workers' culture", published in 1932, where Bomholt tried to outline an independent worker's culture as part of the basis for a socialist society. Emphasizing distinction between individual and collective humanity, he argued for the development of new socialist humanity. He soon moderated his approach, in line with the Danish Social Democrats move from a worker's to a people's party approach. Elected to parliament in 1929, he was a member for 39 years and from 1953 onwards held posts as Minister of Education, Minister of Social Affairs and finally as the first minister of Culture en Denmark. His life and career are closely intertwined with the development of the post-war Danish welfare society. Where the Social Democratic party generally emphasized links between adult education, labour market participation and welfare, Bomholt (and some others) also emphasized the links between adult education and cultural enrichment.

The paper will focus on some key aspects of Bomholt's contribution, including

- His work at the Esbjerg Worker's Folk High School
- The promotion of worker's culture
- Educational responses to youth unemployment
- Promotion of popular enlightenment through broadcasting

- Ideas about cultural democracy and the labour movement

The paper will draw broadly on a sociology of knowledge approach, seeing education policy as linking to the experience of social groups which is then transformed (for instance generalised or marginalised) in the policy process and political-administrative governance. Although the paper will focus on Bomholt and his contribution, this will be situated and discussed in the broader context of Danish adult education traditions and the development of the welfare state.

The paper will draw on some of Bomholt's own writings, on the comprehensive Bomholt autobiography published a few years ago (Petersen, 2021), and on broader accounts of the development of Danish adult education policy.

References
Petersen, J.H. (2021). *Julius Bomholt*. Copenhagen: Gads Forlag.
Bomholt, J. (1932). *Arbejderkultur* [Worker's Culture].
Hyldtoft, O. (2000). *Den poetiske politiker* [The Poetic Politician]. Copenhagen
Korsgaard, O. (2000). Learning and the changing concept of enlightenment: Danish adult education over five centuries. *International Review of Education*, 46 (3/4).
Salling Olesen, H. (1985). *Voksundervisning, hverdagsliv og erfaring* [Adult Education, Everyday Life and Experience]. Copenhagen: Unge Pædagoger.

Steffi Robak (Leibniz Universität Hannover)

Proposal: Transnational employee councils – qualification requirements in a complex field of action

Key words: transnational employee councils, trade union education, educational requirements of stakeholders

Education for Transnational employee councils/European work councils are a sub-area of trade union education that has received only limited attention in research due to the small number of people it targets. Since the establishment and legal institutionalisation of European Works Councils, the number of EWCs has grown steadily (1,200 committees in Europe). They are a very diverse group and face complex challenges, as they are called upon to participate in decision-making processes in transnational companies that affect both location decisions and future socio-technical transformation requirements. Above all, however, they are expected to follow the principle of protecting solidarity. In companies, however, they have only limited formal co-determination powers.

This contribution provides insights into empirical research findings that deal with organised educational activities on the one hand and the educational requirements of European Works Councils/transnational employee representation bodies on the other. The methodological basis consists of qualitative interviews with various actors in transnational representation of interests and reflections on the programmes offered by key providers in this field. It highlights areas of knowledge that have been empirically identified as necessary for action in the transnational sphere. The results provide indications of where political improvements for transnational representation of interests need to be discussed on the one hand, and where educational work can broaden its programmes and offerings on the other.

Bounded Agency in Different Regimes: ALE Participation and Skills Proficiency of Immigrants in Canada and Germany

Keywords: PIAAC, comparative adult education policy research, immigrant participation in ALE, bounded agency

Abstract

This comparative study examines how political and economic frameworks influence adult learning and education (ALE) participation and skills acquisition among immigrants in Canada and Germany. The two countries represent different welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and migration models (Ellermann, 2021). Canada primarily recruits immigrants based on economic criteria, though recent years have seen increased humanitarian admissions (IRCC, 2022). Germany, by contrast, receives continuous labor migration from the EU and asylum seekers from non-EU countries (OECD, 2024a). Not surprisingly, the skill differences between native and foreign-born populations are larger in Germany than in Canada (OECD, 2024b). Against this backdrop, we analyze immigrant skills with a focus on adult literacy and numeracy using OECD PIAAC data.

Theoretical framework: The study is informed by a historical institutionalist perspective that postulates the existence of a foundational conditioning that has resulted in a set of political institutional arrangements that, in turn, leads countries into a certain developmental path (Thelen, 2004), and highlights the political economy of adult learning systems (Desjardins 2017). The assumption is that participation in, and outcome of, adult education and learning activities are contingent upon the interplay between the forces of the state and the market (Bernard, 2021). As outlined in the Bounded Agency Model (Rubenson & Desjardins 2009), the nature of the welfare state regime can affect a person's capability to participate. In particular, the state can foster broad structural conditions relevant to participation and construct targeted policy measures that are aimed at overcoming barriers.

Methodology: The study draws on the first (2011–2012) and second (2022–2023) PIAAC data collections to examine the role of ALE in immigrant integration before and after recent refugee inflows. Using the background questionnaire, participants were classified by factors influencing skills outcomes. Multiple linear regressions modeled proficiency scores across immigrant categories, with ALE participation, job-related learning, and cognitive skill use as independent variables, and demographic, educational, and occupational characteristics as controls. Logistic regressions assessed the impact of ALE participation on literacy and numeracy use at work, comparing participants and non-participants.

Conclusions: Preliminary analyses reveal considerable differences in participation patterns in ALE and skills proficiency among the immigrant populations in Canada and Germany. In both countries, recent refugees benefit from state-led programs but face severe limitations in accessing employer sponsored learning activities.

This paper aims to contribute to: a) comparative adult education policy research; b) to demonstrate how different political and economic frameworks shape the scope for action in ALE for immigrants and c) to provide robust evidence for policy makers.

References

Bernard, A. (2021). *Comparative political economy: Theory and evidence* (1st ed.). Taylor and Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429199462

Desjardins, R. (2017). *Political economy of adult learning systems. Comparative study of strategies, policies, and constraints.* Bloomsbury.

Ellermann, A. (2021). *The Comparative Politics of Immigration. Policy Choices in Germany, Canada, Switzerland, and the United States*. Cambridge University Press.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

IRCC - Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2022). *2022 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration*. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugeescitizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/annual-report-parliament-immigration2022.html

OECD (2024a). State of Immigrant Integration – Germany. OECD Publishing, 2024 2, rue André-Pascal, 75775 PARIS CEDEX 16 Consult this publication online at: bit.ly/458gWuu URL: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/topics/policy-issues/migration/Sii2024--Germany%20(ENG)%20%E2%80%93%20v6%20(FINAL%20with%20bookmarks).pdf; short: Sii2024--Germany (ENG) – v6 (FINAL with bookmarks).pdf (last access 01.12.2024)

OECD (2024b). *Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World?: Survey of Adult Skills 2023*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b263dc5d-en (last access 18.02.2025)

Rubenson, K., & Desjardins, R. (2009). The impact of welfare state regimes on barriers to participation in adult education: A bounded agency model. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59 (3), 187-207.

Thelen, K. (2004). *How Institutions Evolve*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Conference of the ESREA Network on Policy Studies in Adult Education
Adult Learning and Education: Widening the Scope for Action
Research Network Conference

Critical conversations about policy: what they tell us about how common-sense policy discourses shape personal and institutional sense-making and the implications of this for the social justice work of adult education

Denise Shannon
Maynooth University
Supervisor: Dr Fergal Finnegan
Email: denise.shannon.2016@mumail.ie

Key words: Critical discourse studies, policy, sensemaking, common-sense, good sense, hegemony,

Introduction

"Language provides the primary horizon of sense-making for us and thereby shapes the lived experience of being in the world, focusing on just some meanings from the infinitude of possible meanings. When making sense of the world, even nonsense is sense- it is not non-sense. Making sense of the world is making sense of ourselves too, our place within it and our identities. Language enables humankind to construe the natural and social world, to use language tactically or strategically…" (Jessop & Sum, 2013, p. 161)

Over the past twenty-five years, the field of adult and community education in Ireland has been shaped by three landmark national policy documents which are the focus of this inquiry. The ***White Paper, Learning for Life (2000), The Further Education and Training Strategy (Solas, 2014) and Future FET Transforming Learning (Solas, 2020).*** This research has its groundings in a CDA of two of these policy documents, the White Paper (2000) and the FET Strategy (2014). This temporal view enabled an analysis of this trajectory and considerations of the notion of a 'discursive shift' in how language in policy determines a space for the social justice work of adult education. Explicating how discourses like lifelong learning and skills work to supply simplifications of complicated social realities in policy formation. While adult education practice is locally implemented, adult education as policy object is impacted upon by the discursive patterns of globalisation, and therein a neoliberal ideology (Milana, 2012). A policy-as–discourse analysis can uncover how discourses can work to construct policy problems, while also shaping the solutions to problems (Milana, 2012; Bacchi, 2009). This paper presents some findings from a current PhD research which aims to look at the role of policy discourse in personal and institutional sensemaking in the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), the main statutory provider of adult and community education in Ireland. To do this it has engaged in critical conversations about this policy trajectory and its implications for key actors working within the ETBs. Employing a

critical discursive approach to analysing everyday narratives (conversation, storytelling), this inquiry draws from Gramsci's (1971) conceptualisation of 'common- sense' and 'good sense' as the linguistic mechanisms of hegemony and counter-hegemony. Vaara and Whittle (2021) and Weick (1995) provide useful analytical refence points for the ways in which discursive practices underpin the operation of power as 'common sense', 'new sense' and 'non-sense' in personal and institutional sense making.

Hegemony, policy discourse, common-sense, power

Hegemony's power lies in its shaping of our consciousness and so in the discursive sense, the struggle for hegemony, sees particular discourses, such as those we find in policy text, form the basis upon which personal and institutional sensemaking is established (Vaara and Whittle, 2021). They can be vision of policy's goals, desires and interests and / or a representation of the natural or legitimate social order (van Dijk, 1998). In turn, ideologies carried in these discourses inform beliefs that become taken for granted, or 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971, van Dijk, 1993). Discourses establish and maintain power relations in the struggle for hegemony and is played out on what Donoghue (2018) calls the terrain of common sense. Hegemony is maintained through legitimisation of some discourses and the suppression of others (Van Dijk (1993), through what Fairclough (1989) calls a process of 'naturalisation'. They are not viewed as political or ideological but rather the obvious way of making sense of a situation and are 'common sensically given' (Fairclough, 2010, p.34). In an organisational context, dominant discourses can rule in and rule out ways of making sense and serve ideological purposes by advancing a particular political or social system of ideas, values or prescriptions to organise or legitimise particular actions, constructing the 'conditions of possibility' (Vaara and Whittle, 2021). By taking ways of thinking 'off the agenda' alternative ways of thinking become inconceivable (Fairclough 1989, van Dijk, 1998). It is in this sense that power acts discursively, is normally institutionalised and organised hierarchically, structuring the relations of power through the use of discourse (Fairclough, 2010, Van Dijk, 1998). It is this ability that sees the reproduction or transformation of social structures, in ways that benefit some and disadvantage others (Fairclough, 2010, Wodak and Meyer, 2015).

Policy can linguistically interact, structure and inform our knowing of things, whereby reproduction of common- sense can train an incapacity to see the world differently (Weicks, 2001). And yet, through our conversations and storytelling that we “represent our ways of acting and organising, and produce imaginary projects of new or alternative ways, in particular discourses” (Fairclough 2013). On the one hand our sensemaking of social problems can be obscured by hegemonic discourse (Vaara and Whittle, 2021) and on the other, our criticality, values and lived experiences can inform, in Gramsci’s terms, our ‘good sense’ And so, this research is asking: what do these conversations tell us about how policy discourse is shaping personal and institutional sense-making? How do actors , at the interface between policy and practice, legitimise, modify, contest or resist policy in their sensemaking. What is being silenced, constrained, and what is possible for this field of practice within the institution of the ETB. How is this manifesting in terms of critical, uncritical, compliant, and resistant narratives? Critical discourse research has an emancipatory purpose, to critique and reorganise dominant meaning, to destabilise common sense agendas and create new ones. This research hopes to shed light on the implications of policy language for how we sense make the work of adult and community education now, and our imagination for it in the future.

Adult Education in Ireland – contextualising and textualising a field

Adult and community education in Ireland is a diverse field encompassing a breadth of actors in both formal and non-formal settings. As field, it has a rich history of grassroot organisation, community activism, literacy volunteerism, underpinned by radical, critical and social justice principles. There is little written by way of articulating the field of adult education in Ireland until the 1960s, whereby efforts to textualise adult education as a distinctive part or component of the overall education system was initiated with the establishment of Aontas, the National Association of Adult Education in 1969 and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in 1970. Government commissioned Murphy (1973) and Kenny (1984) reports served to construct some meaning and body of knowledge for adult education’s formation and practice at government level (O’Sullivan, 2005). At this time adult education was largely a grassroot, community and voluntary response to the profound educational disadvantage and literacy deficit experienced by large sections of the Irish population. Systemically there was little resources or recognition for adult and community education until the 1997 OECD International Literacy Survey which evidenced that 25% of the adult population in Ireland were at the lowest level in terms of literacy skills. This stark statistic prompted the government's action to formalise and resource an Adult Education

Service within the Vocational Educational Committees (VECs)[1]leading to the 1998 publication of the Green Paper, 'Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning', Ireland's first major policy document on adult education. This was followed shortly by the publication of the seminal 'Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education' (the focus of this inquiry) in 2000. A critical outcome of the White Paper was the resourcing and appointment of the Community Education Facilitators (CEFs) and Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) to work alongside Adult Education Officers (AEOs) to oversee the Adult Literacy and Community Education Programmes in the VECs. It is to these actors that we now turn, those selected for interview have worked in their roles since the publication of the White Paper (2000). The following sections present some findings from our critical conversations, about their experiences of, and perspectives on, this national policy trajectory and institutional transition and its implications for the work of adult and community education.

The White Paper: Learning for Life (2000): It existed, we were heard, it felt like a vision for the sector'

The White Paper: Learning for Life (2000), (from here referred to as the White Paper), heralded the EU concept of 'lifelong learning' in Irish policy making and was "the magic spell in the discourse of educational and economic policymakers" (Lambeir, 2005, p. 350). A central discourse in the agenda for education in the EU, it was proposed as the policy solution for economic advancement, social cohesion, democracy and personal development (Chapman and Aspin, 1997). The Green (1998) and White Paper (2000) encompassed the visionary ideal of lifelong learning as its overarching principle alongside the need to give the status and coherence to adult education as a sector of education in its own right (O'Sullivan, 2005). It signalled the beginning of an era for adult and community education and its development within the institutional context of the VECs, for which up to this point was an invisible part of education provision in Ireland (Fitzsimons 2017; Fleming, 2001). Participants speak of the importance of the work being given visibility and recognition within the VEC as an institution, the resources it brought to the work, and how the policy document itself named and legitimised the language of the work of adult and community education:

> *The White Paper kind of gave us a foundation and it put adult literacy and adult education on the agenda... it wasn't really there until then...*
>
> *...It felt like a vision for the sector...*

[1] There were 33 city and county Vocational Educational Committees in Ireland. These organisations were responsible for providing vocational and further education. The sectoral reform leading to the dissolution of the VECs and establishment of ETBs will be explained later in the paper.

Institutionally, the White Paper was critical for the formal establishment of the Adult Education Services within the VECS, that up to this time was very much dependent on the personal interest of an individual CEO, VEC board member or staff for any kind of provision (O'Sullivan, 2005). Now, guided by the White Paper, provision aimed towards embedding a Freirean approach and community development ethos for adult and community education. This saw, alongside the White Paper, the work of the Adult Literacy Organisers underpinned by the NALA 'Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work'. The guidelines, first devised by those involved in the literacy movement in the 1980s, were underpinned by a philosophy of adult education and concerned with personal development and social action, a learner centred and participatory process (NALA, 2012). Good literacy work was a world apart from prior and often traumatic educational experiences of adults with literacy difficulties (Ward and Ayton, 2019).

> *The focus was empowering individuals, it wasn't on certification, progression or accountability. It was really focused on what the learners wanted to do...*

Community Education Facilitators were recruited based on a preference for a background in community development, rather than a teaching qualification, which brought a new expertise and the language of community education into the VECs that shaped its way of working with communities. Community Education, as described in the White Paper, acknowledged the importance and innovation of Community Education in reaching large numbers of participants in disadvantaged areas, pioneering new approaches to teaching and learning in non-hierarchical, community-based settings and starting from the participants lived experience (White Paper, 2000). Importantly the new approach which previously meant an extension of provision into the community, was now one where it was led by the community:

> *From education in the community but not of the community, ... towards one where community education and community development shared the 'common goal of 'collective empowerment of participants who are affected by decisions to participate in making decisions'* (White Paper, 2000, p.g 110).

This marked a fundamental shift whereby Community Education Facilitators were required to demonstrate *'a deep-rooted knowledge of the communities they serve and a clear understanding and empathy with the philosophy and process of community education* (White Paper, 2000, p. 115). VEC provision was now shaped by learners and their communities. ALOs and CEFs reflect on how they had freedom to innovate and develop the Adult Education Service in ways that responded to the vision of the White Paper:

> *They (AEO) said right, you're coming from a background of community development, that's why we gave you the job, because we want to bring that into what you do, we want to look at how we use the community development ethos and practice and how we apply that into community education…*

It is this recognition of adult and community education as a field of knowledge and practice is what makes the White Paper a seminal policy document. Its wide-ranging consultation process gave voice and visibility to the work of adult and community education in all its diversity, from those who viewed its purpose in terms of a social justice and emancipatory model of education influenced by Freire, to the more functional view of adult education in terms of personal improvement, development and employability. As outlined adult and community education up to this time had relied on a diverse range of actors from grassroot organisation, community activism, literacy volunteerism who shared the normative conviction that adult education was important for personal and social change. This was integral to the language of the White Paper, as it was these actors who were articulating what was meant by adult education (O'Sullivan, 2005). Reflecting on formative professional experiences, the critical conversations in this inquiry, illustrate early days of an emerging field of practice, the reality of profound educational disadvantage and the value of adult and community education in addressing it. Democracy, naming of the world, human flourishing, the value of lived experience, equality, social justice, facilitated learning, nurturing, caring and transformational learning spaces articulate for them the meaning of the work. And yet, despite the White Papers lexical appreciation for the work of adult education and the complexities of educational inequality, it can be argued that 'lifelong learning' as a policy discourse acted to rhetorically resolve the White Paper's social justice goals with its economic ones to realise the ideal of the 'knowledge society' (Fairclough, 2010). This was the beginning of the process of appropriation, whereby adult education's purpose and resourcing would follow the human capital agenda (Grummel, 2007). Lifelong learning's common-sense view now orientated the goals of education with the production of a workforce, 'adaptable and willing to learn knew skills' (DES, 2000, p.9) and marked the beginning of a 'new educational order' (Field, 2006).

Further Education and Training Strategy (2014) - 'A sense making moment'

Significant global and national events would precede the next policy landmark moment for adult and community education in Ireland, the publication of the ***FET Strategy 2014***. The global financial crisis of 2008, led to the collapse of the Irish banking system, a bail out by the Troika (EU, ECB and the World Bank) and an economic recession. A corporate scandal in the National Training and Employment Authority led to its dissolution and a broader reorganisation of training and employment services in Ireland. The VECs (of which there were 33), were replaced with newly established 16 Education and training Boards (ETBs). The functions of the National Training and Employment Authority was absorbed into the ETBs alongside their provision of further education and adult and community education (previously provided by the VEC's). SOLAS, a further education and training authority was established in 2014 to fund, coordinate and monitor the newly formed ETBs and lead a strategic approach to the newly termed 'FET Sector'. 'Adult education' as a field of knowledge and practice given voice, visibility and legitimacy in the White Paper, was replaced by the umbrella term 'FET' (Further Education & Training). The ***Further Education and Training Strategy (Solas, 2014)*** from here referred to as the FET Strategy (2014), set out the vision for the sector. In language terms FET implied a homogeneity for the education and training sector, that that did not exist, with its definition using language that describes a training model of provision, (Glanton, 2023). Working as a nominalisation in policy, a linguistically created thing, FET had privileged discursive status because of its assumed existence. Policy uses nominalisations to present hegemonic social arrangements as objective and unchangeable (Billig, 2008). Obscuring and backgrounding the process itself, nominals are processes that do not specify participants, and so who is doing what to whom is left implicit (Fairclough, 1992). FET was defined as follows:

> "FET provides education and training and related supports to assist individuals to gain qualifications at Levels 1-6 on the NFQ [National Framework of Qualifications] or equivalent, to attain and refresh economically-valuable skills to access and sustain all types of employment, tackling skills shortages and boosting the future growth and competitiveness of the Irish economy (SOLAS 2014, 51)"

Power in sensemaking in terms of 'sense giving', as the imposition of preferred meaning systems, sees actors think and behave in ways that further particular ends (Vaara and Whittle, 2021). Policy 'sense giving' at EU level saw a shift from lifelong learning encompassing adult education in a broader sense, to a narrowing of its purpose in terms of skills development for employability (Shannon, 2019). When analysing policy discourse in terms of EU to nation state interactions, Jessop's (2007) concept of 'discursive selectivity' acknowledges the role of discourse in influencing and giving coherence to national policy. This sees nation states, drawing on discourses like lifelong learning and skills in 'strategic and discursively selective' ways for policy formation (Shannon, 2019). In this way, it can be argued that the EU has 'strong discursive ability' (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010), in that it shapes what accounts come to dominate in policy formation, contingent with certain agendas (Milana, 2014). These agendas, more often than not, pursue economic rather than social and democratic objectives (Shannon, 2019). And so, sense giving involves a power dimension when actors 'sense break' what was previously understood and meant by something such as 'adult education' to give it new meaning (Matere et al., 2012). FET became the 'new sense' through which the language, practice and meaning of adult and community education could now be understood.

In sensemaking, new words carry 'new sense' as cues in language which form the basis or 'raw material', the categories and meaning systems, through which a selection of these cues turn into shared meanings (Vaara and Whittle, 2021). Cues have meaning when they are extracted and interpreted as part of a context or process of explaining what is going on (Weick, et al., 2005). The term 'extracted cue' or 'salient cue' (Weick, 2001) explain how only certain cues will be extracted in sensemaking as they have salience within a genre. A genre is the language associated within a sphere of social activity such as the Further Education and Training Sector for example (Fairclough, 2010). FET is the 'sense giving' agent of sectoral reform, that enables a 'relexicalization' of a new set of concepts in a new set of lexical terms or cues for the work of adult and community education (Fowler, et al. 1979, Vaara and Whittle, 2021). Institutions like the ETB have distinct collections or repertoires of genres which change over time (Fairclough, 2010). Importantly for this inquiry discourses within genres can benefit certain social groups and disempower or disadvantage others (Fairclough, 1994 and van Dijk, 1998). The concept of genre clarifies the ways in which language in the sense making is a taken for granted and habitual process, not only for moments of crisis but also in the day-to-day sensemaking whereby actors rely on established, simple, unifying and overarching terms such as lifelong learning and FET within which social relations can be conceptualised and operationalised (Vaara and Whittle, 2021, Donoghue, 2016).

> *...it [FET] brought a whole new language, a FÁS language, of outputs, outcomes, outturns, targets, Strategic Performance Agreements (SPA's)that was alien to the ALCE [adult education] sector...*

As part of the sectoral reform ETBs were now required to transition institutionally as an entity and bring together two worlds in terms of education. One primarily focused on upskilling, reskilling, and training for employment; the other a field of practice concerned with inequality, democracy and social justice. It is in this sense that genre matters and shape power relations in distinct ways; firstly, in how the mode of writing or talking used articulates the work of adult and community education and secondly how it shapes the nature of participation, who can contribute, to what extent can they make sense of a situation using the language of the dominant genre, in this case, the language of FET, and then how their sense as articulated, is viewed as legitimate and valid (Vaara and Whittle, 2021). Common- sense establishes and reproduces power relations whereby alternative ways of making sense that challenge 'common sense', or prevailing power arrangements can be dismissed as extreme or inconceivable 'non-sense' by those who want to maintain the status quo (Vaara and Whittle, 2021). Discursive strategies are used through text and talk to dismiss this sense as 'wishful thinking' or 'dangerous ideology'. Texts and language related to such sense are removed, sidelined or silenced in order to censor alternative ways of thinking about the work (Vaara and Whittle, 2021, Gramsci, 1971, etc). Critical conversations speak to this silencing:

> *I think the functionalist perspective that has dominated policy discourse, and has been used to talk about socialisation of adults through learning or training and how as a result they are more productive members of society... That's used a lot, and what's absent then, in any of the policy that I read is any of the language around education for political change or for critical action or for radical change, it's just not there, it's completely missing…*
>
> *In ways I am feeling old fashioned...because the language has changed so much that if I bring in other language now people haven't heard it, because there's been such a changeover in staff and a changeover in the language and everything we do, and the language now is of compliance rather than inclusion...*
>
> *I mean, I've been told I'm defensive... I've been told that I'm tedious...in senior management meetings because I keep going on about the adult education agenda...*

In the absence of current policy language to articulate the work in current policy discourse, many refer to and draw on older guideline documents such as Community Education Operational Guidelines (2012) and the National Adult Literacy Agency 'Guidelines for Good Literacy Work' (NALA, 2012), to articulate and sense make the ethos and principles underpinning the work, particularly with new staff and tutors. Many spoke about importance of hiring the right tutors and staff into the service that 'get it':

> *We still talking about something [the White Paper] from 23 years ago, you know? Our Community Education Programme guidelines come from 2012, but even that, that's eleven years ago, but those guidelines are from the White Paper as well, that's where they come from…[CEF}*
>
> *...If I'm recruiting someone, I'm looking for someone who either understands it [adult education] or we can bring them to a place where they understand it. And I think that's really critical because I think policy is policy, and it's always there...*

Some speak to how the concept of 'Public Sector Duty' has been useful in terms of introducing the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission legislation into ETB strategy statements, whereby it is not just about skills for the economy, as a public sector body there is a wider societal remit for the ETB.

> ... *we managed to get like values of inclusion and empowerment and community into our strategy statement…we've worked really hard from a public sector duty point of view, to come back to the idea that we [the ETB] have a public sector duty… and I'm beginning to see it influencing...(AEO)*

It can be said that this is a way of challenging dominant discourse, whereby a previous 'sense' taken for granted as 'common sense' can be questioned, resisted and replaced with a 'new sense' (Vaara and Whittle, 2021). This sense can carry different ideological assumptions and can challenge and de-naturalise the sense that is viewed as natural, obvious and right (Fairclough 1989). As Gramsci contended 'good sense' sees the emancipatory potential of language through counter-discourses that can de-naturalise the dominant discourse and no alternative world view. A policy vision for the 'FET College of the Future' ushers further structural reform for the ETB, how adult and community education can be situated and articulated within this vision is the focus of the next section.

FET College of the Future – a new policy vision

In 2020, Solas published its second national policy for the sector, Future ***FET: Transforming Learning Strategy (2020)*** which sets out a vision for **'FET College of the future'.** As a sensemaking devices linguistic tools like metaphors and analogies can serve ideological purposes by highlighting certain aspects, downplaying structural conflicts or obscuring others (Budd, 2019). Cited on solas.ie www.solas.ie/about/fet-college-of-the-future/ FET College of the Future is described as:

> *"An ethos, a way of delivering Further Education and Training into the future, and of evolving our facilities and our FET provision into a distinct integrated FET College offering...[it] will modernise and upgrade Colleges of FET to provide transformational learner experiences. Sustainable campuses that will deliver modern skills development opportunities and learning spaces, that will serve communities and learners alike"*

FET College of the Future legitimises and naturalises management ideas and organisational practices (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002), for making common-sense actions for reform natural and inevitable (Budd, 2019). Accompanying the vision for FET college of the Future is the message that 'FET is for Everyone, regardless of one's level of education, can take you as far as you want to go' (Future FET, 2020). FET College of the Future metaphorically functions to reframe how the ETB sees itself institutionally vis-à-vis higher education. Conversations express criticality, scepticism and perplexity about what the concept means, alongside a concern about how it is reconfiguring the ETB's relationship with its learners and communities:

> *...I don't know where it [FET College of the Future] sits with adult education, and I think we're in a very kind of very unknown time with all this kind of talk of the FET college of the future... nobody has a clue what it means, as far as I can see… And where my kind of like scepticism comes is....it has been used in the past to kind of subsume ideas that are around our idea of adult education, about emancipatory education, to kind of fit in with the neoliberal agenda that's been pushed…*
>
> *... it's like the calling ourselves now the FET College of the Future... I don't know what the working through of that is other than... just remember to call ourselves the FET college of the future…*
>
> *I think to resource the FET College of the Future, can't mean that we absolutely deplete and strip out what we actually do best, which is that local provision and that locally based centre provision, which are in small towns across the country.*

... you know, all this talk FET is for everyone. This all sounds wonderful, but, if you look at the strategic performance agreements are key, that's where the money is, and that's what the ETB's are responding to, and the new funding model is based on meeting those targets...

New Strategic Performance Agreements (SPAs) between Solas and the newly established ETBs reconfigure the funding arrangement for adult and community education towards an outcomes model (Hartley, Rutherford and Owens, 2022). This means that the focus of the work is on capturing learner data on certification, progression and employment to meet targets set by Solas. And so, while current FET policy sets out that "the core values of FET are lifelong learning, social justice, active citizenship and economic prosperity" (Solas, 2020, p.36). Narrow metrics used to value the work do not go any way towards capturing these wider benefits despite commitments to "ensure that such a spectrum of benefits is integrated into the way its [FET] value is measured" (Solas, 2020, p. 26). The data gathered, despite its profound limitations, will determine the resources and funding that go into adult and community education programmes. A public ranking of ETBs based on their annual Strategic Performance Agreement Progress Reports, galvanises institutional sensemaking around the achievement of targets set by Solas. Critical conversations speak about an engendered competitiveness and rivalry between ETBs and between colleagues and programmes within the ETB which has refashioned of a new common-sense transactional and business model approach to working with learners and communities:

... what happened then with the targets, I think the sector came became quite competitive within itself.... You know, how many learners do we have...somehow that also got lodged in the programmes, so it was adult literacy... how many learners in adult literacy... how many learners are in BTEI... so a different dynamic got established.... a sibling competitive, envy, rivalry dynamic, it seemed to move away a bit from the learners and then it developed into the Further Education and Training [FET]sector.. (AEO)

The ethos of the service is being erased... It is a transactional process, the learner gets the course, we get their data...(AEO)

I think [FET] is more of a business model rather the old partnership model of working together. The ETB [now] has targets to meet and community groups work to meet those targets… The focus is on accountability and making sure the organisation [ETB] is protected and meeting its targets.

Actually, there is the feeling that people don't really care about them [disadvantaged groups] or don't want to sit beside them and work with them… And that's a very clear message out there at the moment... And that was the opposite message of adult education…

Where is the 'good sense'? Counter hegemonic discourses for resistance

Orientating the work of adult and community education in common sense terms towards data gathering to achieve progression and certification targets, acts as a systemic power. This power works to gain the active consent of dominated individuals and groups, aligning their behaviour with the interests of the powerful actors, through cognitive, cultural and discursive structures (Clegg, 1989). FET policy discourses mobilise, value laden standpoints and moral assumptions (Vaara and Whittle, 2021) about the work of adult and community education, reconfiguring relations internally between staff in education programmes, and externally with learners and communities. Critical conversations speak to the implications of this shift in emphasis for the participative and learner centred ethos of adult and community education as legitimised in the White Paper. FET is a new plane along which micro – moral relations are conceptualised and administered (Rose, 1996 in Donoghue, 2016). This has implications for how adult education is understood, taking ways of working with community and learners 'off the table' or made more operationally difficult because of target driven data collection. However, in sensemaking terms there is a constant struggle of agency and constraint in discursive practices as actors make sense of social and organisational phenomena (Vaara and Whittle, 2021, Fairclough, 2010). Formative experiences in the early days of literacy, community development and community education underpin narratives of resistance and sensemaking of work arounds to systemic power. 'Everyday tactics of resistance' De Certeau (1984), see people take positive action and affirm their sense of self within the dominant ideology of the spaces wherein they live and work. Resistance is manifested 'right at the point where relations of power of are exercised' (Foucault, 1980 p.142 in Schildt, 2019):

> *You know some of the systems have made me more devious, because I'm thinking, OK, how do we work around it, you know and....And I've got better at asking forgiveness than permission...But that's at a personal cost as well, because I do wake up in the middle of the night, and I think oh...*

Some use their social capital and expertise to circumvent, ignore or undermine demonstrating reflexivity of their social position and drawing on contradictory discourses and knowledge structures (Schildt, 2019):

> *I didn't change who I was or my approach to learning didn't change when the policy told me it was all about jobs. I looked at that and thought, well, how can adult learning work with that to maintain what we do, to ensure the methodology is in, the groundings were good, that if that's what the focus, we look at that and sometimes we circumvent it and sometimes we ignore it and sometimes we, you know, we pay lip service to it and we go and do what's important to do..*

Many spoke to a reliance on the sensemaking of senior management and colleagues to work in this way, some even coming to new understandings and compromises despite conflicting positions:

> *…I am lucky in the sense that they have a good understanding of Community Education and its values. They also appreciate the work involved in the developing strong and meaningful community groups..*
>
> *[My AEO] has come to understanding the social outcomes space but actually...they are very much driven by the systems approach, I would say...*

The use of language lies at the very heart of sensemaking, structuring relations of power, domination and control (Vaara and Whittle, 2021). The ways in which policy discourse is modified, ignored and resisted in sense making, and the reliance on perspectives, relationships and workarounds in the day-to-day practice of adult and community education is evidently critical. FET policy discourse is being internalised in institutional sensemaking in ways that hegemonically renders ways of sense only meaningful and intelligible within the language and associated form of reasoning that FET discourses provide (Fairclough, 2010, Weick, 2020, van Dijk, 1998). A critical discursive lens on the role of language in sensemaking makes clear where the language comes from and how it works in terms of prevailing discourses, not just in the current moment but also how "historical and culturally contingent systems of knowledge provide the discourses that constitute the conditions of possibility in sensemaking" (Vaara and Whittle, 2021, pg. 19). As FET narrows the conditions of possibility for adult and community education, articulating counter hegemonic 'good sense' to policy will be critical for sensemaking the work of adult and community education now, and our imagination for its work in the future.

References:

BILLIG, M. (2008). The language of critical discourse analysis: the case of nominalization. *Discourse & Society*, *19*(6), 783–800. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42889231

Budd, K., Kelsey, D., Mueller, F. and Whittle, A. (2019). 'Metaphor, morality and legitimacy: A critical discourse studies of the media framing of the payday loan industry'. *Organization*, 26, 802– 29.

Commission on Adult Education. (1984). Lifelong learning (Kenny Report). Dublin: Stationery Office.

Crehan, K (2016). *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and its narratives*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Chapman, J.D. and Aspin, D.N. (1997). *The School, the Community and Lifelong Learning*: London: Cassell.

Chiapello, E. & Fairclough, N. (2002). Understanding the new management ideology: A transdisciplinary contribution from critical discourse analysis and new sociology of capitalism. Discourse & Society, 13(2), 185–208.

Clegg, S. (1989). Frameworks of power. London: SAGE Publications.

De Certeau, M. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life* (S. Rendall, Trans.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press

Department of Education and Science. (1998) Green Paper: adult education in an era of learning. Dublin: Stationary Office

Department of Education and Science. (2000). Learning for Life: White Paper on adult education. Dublin: Stationary Office.

Department of Education and Skills (2012) 'Community Education Programme, Operational Guidelines for Providers http://www.cefa.ie/uploads/1/5/8/8/15883224/community-education-operational-guidelines-to-vecs.pdf

Donoghue, M (2016). Cohesion as 'common sense': Everyday narratives of community and cohesion in New Labour's Britain [Electronic version] Politics 36(3) 262-276.

Donoghue, M.. (2018). Beyond Hegemony: Elaborating on the Use of Gramscian Concepts in Critical Discourse Analysis for Political Studies. *Political Studies*, *66*(2), 392–408. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717722362

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power.* White Plains, NY: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2005) 'Critical Discourse Analysis', Marges Linguistiques 9: 76-94.

Fairclough, N. 2010. *Critical Discourse Analysis – The Critical Study of Language.* Malaysia: Pearson Education Limited.

Fairclough, N. (2013) Critical discourse analysis and critical policy studies, *Critical Policy Studies*, 7:2, 177-197, DOI: 10.1080/19460171.2013.798239

Field, J. 2006. *Lifelong Learning and the new educational order*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Fitzsimons, C. 2017. Community Education and Neoliberalism – Philosophies, Practices and Policies in Ireland. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fleming, T. 2001. Learning for Life – The White Paper: A Discussion. The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education: The Adult Learner, pp.27–35.

Foucault, M. (1980). Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings by Michel Foucault, 1972–77. New York: Pantheon.

Fowler, R., Hodge, B., Kress, G. and Trew, T. (1979) Language and Social Control. London: Routledge

Gramsci, A (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks.* Translated and edited by Quitin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers.

Grummell, B. 2007. The 'Second Chance' Myth: Equality of Opportunity in Irish Education Policies. British Journal of Educational Studies, pp.182–201.

Glanton, N. (2023) Adult education in a neoliberal policy paradigm, Irish Educational Studies, 42:4, 787-803.

Hartley, Fiona, Ken Rutherford, and Ted Owens.2022.Further Education and Training FundingModel Review Final Report by the Independent Expert Panel. Dublin Further Education and Training Funding Model Review

Jessop, B. 2007. *State Power: A strategic-relational approach*. Cambridge, MA: Polity.

Maitlis, S., & Sonenshein, S. (2010). Sensemaking in crisis and change: Inspiration and insights from Weick (1988). Journal of Management Studies, 47, 551–580.

Mantere, S., Schildt, H. A. and Sillince, J. A. A. (2012). 'Reversal of strategic change'. Academy of Management Journal, 55, 172–96.

Milana, M. 2014. Europeanisation and the changing nature of the (European) state. In: Milana, M. and Holford, J. eds. Adult Education Policy and the European Union Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives. Rotterdam/ Boston/ Taipei: Sense Publishers, pp.73–90.

Murphy, C. (1973). Adult Education in Ireland: A Report of a Committee appointed by the Minister for Education. Dublin: Government Stationery Office.

Lambeir, B. 2005. Education as liberation: The politics and techniques of lifelong learning. Educational Philosophy and Theory, pp.349–56.

NALA (2010). *NALA 1980 – 2010 A Living History*. Dublin https://www.nala.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/NALA-1980-2010-a-living-history.pdf

NALA (2012): Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work: Key reference document for people working in adult literacy. https://www.nala.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/NALA-Guidelines-for-good-adult-literacy-work.pdf

O'Sullivan, D., (2005). *Culture Politics and Irish Education: Policy Paradigms and Power*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Schildt, H., Mantere, S. and Cornelissen, J. 'Power in the sensemaking process'. *Organisational Studies,* 41, 241-65.

Shannon, D. (2018). A tale of a discursive shift: Analysing EU policy discourses in Irish adult education policy- from the White Paper to the Further Education and Training Strategy. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Maynooth University.

Shannon, D. (2019). A tale of a discursive shift: Analysing EU policy discourses in Irish adult education policy- from the White Paper to the Further Education and Training Strategy. Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education. 98-117

SOLAS. 2014. Further Education and Training Strategy. Dublin: SOLAS.

SOLAS. 2020. Future FET: Transforming Learning, The National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy. Dublin: SOLAS.

van, Dijk, T.A, (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. Discourse & Society, 1993, 4(2) 249-28.

van Dijk, T. A. (1998). Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach. London: Sage.

van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. Discourse & Society, 17(3), 359-383. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506060250

Vaara, E and Whittle, A (2021). Common Sense, New Sense or Non-sense? A Critical Discursive Perspective on Power in Collective Sensemaking. Journal of Management Studies 2022, 59 (3) 754-781

Weick, K. E. (1995). Sensemaking in Organizations. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weick, K. E. (2001). Making Sense of the Organization. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M. and Obstfeld, D. (2005). ‘Organizing and the process of sensemaking’. Organization Science, 16, 409–21.

Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (Eds.) (2015). Methods of Critical Discourse Studies. London: Sage.

Brown, A.D. & Humphreys, M. 2006. Organizational identity and place: A discursive exploration of hegemony and resistance. Journal of Management Studies, 43, 2: 231-257.

Ward, F. and Ayton, P (2019) A short history of the Adult Literacy Service and the Foundation of the Adult Literacy Organisers Association. Adult Literacy Organisers Association. http://www.aloa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/A-Short-History-of-the-Adult-Literacy-Service-and-ALOA-4.pdf

ALINE ROCHA SANTANA DA SILVA (Colégio Pedro II / Unigranrio)

From Inclusion Policy to Emancipatory Practice: The History and Challenges of the Mulheres Mil Programme in Brazil

Abstract

This article examines the historical trajectory, implementation and current challenges of the Mulheres Mil Programme (Thousand Women Programme) in Brazil — a public policy initiative aimed at promoting the social and professional inclusion of women in situations of vulnerability through education and vocational training. Conceived within the framework of the National Programme for Access to Technical Education and Employment (Pronatec) and inspired by principles of social justice and gender equity, Mulheres Mil represents one of the most significant policy experiences in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in Latin America. Drawing on policy documents, institutional reports and interviews with programme coordinators and participants, the article analyses the tensions between its emancipatory aims and the instrumental rationality that has increasingly guided Brazilian public training policy. Grounded in critical and feminist theories of education (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Stromquist, 2015), and situated within broader debates on ALE policy and the Global South (Milana & Holford, 2014; Mayo, 2015), the study argues that Mulheres Mil exemplifies the contradictions of contemporary ALE policy: situated between empowerment and adaptation, between social inclusion and labour-market discipline. By recovering the programme's history and the voices of educators and participants, the article contributes to international discussions on how gender-focused ALE initiatives can sustain emancipatory practices despite structural and political constraints.

Keywords: Adult Learning and Education; Public Policy; Gender and Education; Women's Empowerment; Social Justice; Brazil.

1. Introduction

Questions of gender equity, social inclusion and the transformative potential of adult education have occupied a central place in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) policy debates for several decades. Yet, as Stromquist (2015) argues, the relationship between education and women's empowerment remains marked by persistent tensions: while educational access has expanded significantly in the Global South, the conditions under which that access translates into genuine social and economic transformation are far from guaranteed. In Brazil, this tension has been particularly visible in the evolution of publicly funded vocational training programmes for women — caught between emancipatory aspirations rooted in Freirean and feminist pedagogical traditions, and the disciplinary pressures of neoliberal governance.

The Mulheres Mil Programme — Programa Mulheres Mil, literally 'A Thousand Women' — offers an especially illuminating case study of this tension. Launched in 2007 as a pilot collaboration between Brazilian Federal Institutes and Canadian community colleges, and subsequently scaled into a nationwide policy under the Pronatec framework in 2013, the programme has reached tens of thousands of women in situations of social and economic vulnerability across all Brazilian regions. Its stated aims — to combine vocational qualification with citizenship formation, recognition of women's life histories, and community development — placed it firmly within the tradition of critical adult education articulated by Freire (1970) and extended by feminist scholars such as hooks (1994) and Stromquist (2007).

At the same time, the programme's trajectory illustrates what Mayo (2015) describes as the counter-hegemonic vocation of adult education under constant pressure from market-oriented logics. As Mulheres Mil was absorbed into Pronatec and subjected to the productivity targets and employability metrics that govern that larger framework, its original political-pedagogical character was progressively narrowed. This article traces that trajectory, examines its consequences for participants and educators, and reflects on the conditions under which gender-focused ALE programmes can resist such reductions and affirm their emancipatory

potential.

The analysis draws on policy documents, institutional reports, and interviews with coordinators and participants from Federal Institutes across Brazil. It is organised as follows: section two provides the theoretical framework; section three traces the history and institutional evolution of the programme; section four analyses the tensions between emancipation and employability in its implementation; section five presents participant and educator perspectives; and section six offers concluding reflections on the programme's lessons for ALE policy in the Global South.

2. Theoretical Framework: Feminist Pedagogy, ALE Policy and the Global South

The theoretical foundations of this study are drawn from two intersecting bodies of scholarship: feminist and critical theories of adult education, and the growing literature on ALE policy analysis in the Global South.

Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of liberating education — grounded in the primacy of learners' lived experience, the critique of banking-model pedagogy, and the inseparability of education from political consciousness — has long served as a reference point for progressive adult education policy in Brazil. Freire's insistence that authentic education begins with naming the world as it is experienced by the oppressed finds its institutional expression in the methodological principles that shaped the original Mulheres Mil design: the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), the valorisation of women's domestic and community knowledge, and the integration of vocational training with citizenship formation.

This Freirean orientation was extended and deepened by feminist scholarship that drew attention to the gendered dimensions of educational exclusion and empowerment. Joan Scott's (1999) foundational argument that gender is a primary field through which power is articulated provides an essential analytical basis for understanding why vocational training programmes directed at women carry an inherently political charge — they intervene in a social field that has historically defined women's knowledge and labour as secondary. hooks (1994) argued that education as the practice of freedom requires not only curricular transformation but a transformation of pedagogical relations — one in which the classroom becomes a site of collective inquiry rather than transmission. Stromquist (2015) further elaborated this position in the context of women's education in the Global South, arguing that genuine empowerment through education requires attention to four interrelated dimensions: cognitive (knowledge and critical thinking), psychological (self-esteem and agency), political (capacity for collective action) and economic (access to resources and opportunities). These dimensions provide an analytical lens through which to evaluate the extent to which Mulheres Mil fulfilled, or fell short of, its emancipatory potential.

From an ALE policy perspective, Milana and Holford (2014) argue that adult education policy must be understood as a terrain of contestation between competing institutional interests and ideological frameworks. The tension between emancipatory and instrumental orientations in ALE policy — between education as a right and education as a tool for labour market integration — is not a Brazilian peculiarity but a structural feature of adult education policy globally, intensified by neoliberal restructuring. Field (2006) identifies the tendency of lifelong learning policy to responsibilise individuals for their own employability as a defining feature of this instrumental turn. Mayo (2015), drawing on Gramsci and Freire, argues that adult education can serve counter-hegemonic purposes only when it is grounded in the lived realities and collective knowledge of marginalised groups and protected from reduction to market-oriented logics. These frameworks are applied here to the analysis of Mulheres Mil's evolution from a feminist pedagogical experiment to a component of a large-scale national vocational training system.

3. The History and Institutional Evolution of Mulheres Mil

The origins of Mulheres Mil lie in a bilateral cooperation agreement between Brazil and Canada, signed in 2007 under the auspices of the Brazilian Secretariat of Professional and Technological Education (SETEC) and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC, now Colleges and Institutes Canada). The partnership drew on the Canadian community college model's experience with equity-oriented access programmes and applied it to the Brazilian context of the Northeast and North regions, where social vulnerability among women was — and remains — most acute (Schiedeck Soares de Souza, 2021). The pilot

phase, which ran from 2007 to 2011, benefited nearly 1,200 women across a network of Federal Institutes, offering short vocational courses combined with a methodology adapted from the Canadian Access, Retention and Exit (ARE) model — reconfigured in Brazil as the Methodology for Access, Retention and Success (MAPE).

The choice of Federal Institutes as the primary institutional vehicle for the programme was significant. Unlike conventional vocational training providers, Federal Institutes — created as a national network by Law 11.892 of 2008 — combine secondary vocational education, higher education and research within a single institution, with a statutory mandate to prioritise the social and economic development of their territorial communities. This mandate gave Federal Institute educators considerable pedagogical autonomy and a professional culture oriented towards social inclusion that distinguished them from the market-driven providers that would later be enrolled in Pronatec. It was within this institutional context that the feminist-Freirean methodology of Mulheres Mil took root and flourished during the pilot phase.

The MAPE methodology represented the distinctively feminist-Freirean character of the programme in its pilot phase. Rather than beginning with vocational content, courses began with the documentation and recognition of women's life histories — their prior learning, their community knowledge, their experiences of care, labour and exclusion. This process served simultaneously as an instrument of pedagogical assessment and as an act of political recognition: naming and valuing what the education system had historically ignored. Participants were encouraged to identify their own educational and professional objectives, and course content was developed in dialogue with those objectives rather than imposed by institutional curricula. The approach resonated strongly with Freire's (1970) insistence that authentic education must begin with the generative themes of learners' own lives, and with hooks' (1994) argument that the practice of freedom requires a classroom characterised by mutual respect and collaborative inquiry.

The programme's formalisation through Ministerial Ordinance 1,015 of July 2011, which established Mulheres Mil as a national policy and integrated it into the Brasil Sem Miséria (Brazil Without Poverty) social protection plan, represented both a significant expansion and the first sign of institutional tension. The ordinance defined the target audience as low-income, socially vulnerable women living in communities within the Territórios da Cidadania (Citizenship Territories) — areas with low Human Development Index scores — and set ambitious enrolment targets. The first national call for participation (CHAMADA PÚBLICA MEC/SETEC 01/2011) established 100 new programme centres across all Brazilian states, aiming for 10,000 enrolments; the second call, in 2012, added a further 10,200 places. By 2013, 210 Federal Institute units had joined the programme, generating 17,000 enrolments in that year alone.

The programme's integration into Pronatec in 2013 marked a qualitative shift in its institutional character. Pronatec — the National Programme for Access to Technical Education and Employment — was conceived primarily as a supply-side response to Brazil's skills deficit, aimed at rapidly expanding the provision of short vocational courses linked to labour market demand (World Bank, 2015). Its metrics privileged enrolment numbers, completion rates and labour market placement over the qualitative pedagogical processes that had defined the Mulheres Mil pilot. Under this framework, the MAPE methodology — with its emphasis on life histories, collective inquiry and feminist pedagogy — was progressively marginalised in favour of standardised vocational curricula aligned with sectoral demand. As Freire (1970) might have predicted, the banking model reasserted itself once the institutional context shifted from an experimentally feminist Federal Institute network to a large-scale national training programme governed by productivity targets.

The political upheavals of the mid-2010s further disrupted the programme's continuity. The impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the subsequent administrations of Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro brought a profound reorientation of social and educational policy in Brazil. Pronatec itself was restructured and defunded; the institutional infrastructure that had supported Mulheres Mil was dismantled; and the feminist and social justice orientations that had animated the programme were explicitly marginalised in a political context marked by anti-gender ideology and the rollback of social policies. The programme's survival in this period depended almost entirely on the institutional commitment of individual Federal Institutes and the pedagogical convictions of their educators — a fragile but significant form of institutional resilience.

4. Between Emancipation and Employability: Analytical Tensions

The trajectory of Mulheres Mil illustrates with particular clarity the tension that Milana and Holford (2014) identify as constitutive of ALE policy: the contestation between an emancipatory vision of adult education and the instrumental rationality of labour market policy. This tension was not merely ideological but institutional: it was expressed in the programme's governance structures, its funding mechanisms, its performance indicators and its pedagogical methodologies.

In its pilot phase, the programme's emancipatory orientation was sustained by several institutional conditions: the relative autonomy of the Federal Institutes from centralised ministerial control; the partnership with Canadian colleges that brought a recognised model of equity-oriented practice; the involvement of educators with commitments to feminist and Freirean pedagogy; and the modest scale that allowed for contextualised, community-embedded implementation. These conditions enabled a form of what Mayo (2015) calls counter-hegemonic adult education: grounded in the lived realities of participants, attentive to the multiple dimensions of women's empowerment identified by Stromquist (2015), and oriented towards the development of critical consciousness rather than merely occupational competencies. Rubenson (2006) would recognise in this pilot the characteristics of an integrated lifelong learning policy — one in which educational provision is articulated with broader social commitments rather than subordinated to labour market supply-and-demand logics.

The integration into Pronatec disrupted each of these conditions. Standardised curricula displaced life-history methodologies; completion targets displaced qualitative assessment; sectoral demand displaced community need as the organising principle of course design. The World Bank's (2015) own assessment of Pronatec noted that the programme succeeded in expanding access but was less successful in generating sustained employment outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable participants — a finding consistent with the critique that supply-side training initiatives, however large in scale, cannot resolve demand-side structural discrimination. For women enrolled in Mulheres Mil under the Pronatec framework, this structural limitation was compounded by the loss of the feminist pedagogical support that had enabled many earlier participants to develop the psychological and political dimensions of empowerment that Stromquist (2015) identifies as preconditions for sustainable social change.

Educators interviewed for this study described the tension between institutional expectations and pedagogical convictions with particular acuity:

> We knew what the women needed. They needed to talk about their lives, about their children, about violence. They needed to feel that their knowledge counted. But the programme [after Pronatec integration] said: you have 120 hours, here is the curriculum, here are the competencies. There was no space for what actually transforms people.

This account resonates with Field's (2006) analysis of the responsibilising logic of neoliberal lifelong learning policy: by framing vocational training as an individual investment in employability, such policies simultaneously acknowledge and disavow the structural conditions that produce vulnerability. Women who fail to translate their training into employment are implicitly positioned as having failed to invest adequately in their own human capital, rather than as victims of a labour market structured by gender, race and class discrimination.

At the same time, the evidence gathered from participants and educators suggests that the programme's emancipatory potential was never entirely extinguished, even within the Pronatec framework. The institutional culture of the Federal Institutes — which has a deeper and more autonomous pedagogical tradition than that of the private training providers also enrolled in Pronatec — created spaces in which educators could maintain elements of the feminist methodology even when the formal curriculum precluded them. As one coordinator noted:

> We always found a way to include the circle of culture, the life histories. Maybe not in the official hours, maybe in a coffee break, maybe in the way we opened the day. Freire does not need a formal space. He lives in the attitude.

This finding is consistent with what Mayo (2015) describes as the pedagogical resilience of committed adult educators working within constraining institutional structures — a form of everyday counter-hegemony that operates at the micro-level of practice even when macro-level policy structures are inhospitable.

5. Participant and Educator Perspectives: Outcomes and Meanings

The voices of participants and educators gathered through interviews reveal a complex picture of outcomes that cannot be reduced to either the programme's official performance indicators or its critics' dismissals. Across the accounts collected, three themes emerge with particular consistency: the transformative significance of recognition, the fragility of economic outcomes, and the importance of collective experience.

The theme of recognition — the acknowledgement, within an institutional educational setting, of the value and validity of women's existing knowledge and experience — emerged as the most consistently cited transformative dimension of the programme. For many participants, the encounter with MAPE methodology represented a first experience of being treated as knowing subjects rather than as deficient ones:

> I had never thought that what I knew counted for anything in school. I knew how to cook, how to manage a household with almost no money, how to care for sick people. The course said: this is knowledge. This has value. I had never heard that before.
>
> When they asked me to tell my story, I cried. Not because it was sad, but because someone was listening. In my whole life, no institution had ever asked me: who are you? What do you know? What do you want?

These accounts illustrate what Stromquist (2015) identifies as the psychological dimension of empowerment: the development of self-esteem and a sense of agency that precedes and enables other forms of transformation. They also reflect hooks' (1994) argument that education as the practice of freedom requires a pedagogical relationship characterised by mutual recognition and authentic dialogue — conditions that the MAPE methodology was specifically designed to create.

The economic outcomes of the programme were more ambiguous. While many participants reported gains in confidence and expanded social networks that supported their search for employment, direct labour market insertion proved elusive for a significant proportion. The structural barriers to employment documented in other studies of Black and poor Brazilian women — discrimination in hiring, concentration in precarious and informal work, the double burden of paid and unpaid labour — were not resolved by vocational training alone. As one participant noted:

> The course gave me a certificate and gave me back my confidence. But the market does not care about my confidence. They see my age, they see my colour, they see where I live. The course did not change that.

This finding reinforces Field's (2006) critique of responsibilising discourses in lifelong learning: the assumption that individual qualification is sufficient to overcome structural labour market exclusion places an unfair burden on women who face discrimination that no amount of training can individually resolve. It also underlines the importance of Stromquist's (2015) insistence that genuine empowerment requires attention to the political and economic dimensions of women's lives, not only to their cognitive development or psychological growth.

The third theme — the value of collective experience — appeared consistently across both participant and educator accounts. The programme's group-based format, which brought together women from the same community or neighbourhood, created conditions for solidarity, mutual support and collective reflection that participants frequently described as among the most significant outcomes of their participation:

> I came for a certificate. I stayed for the group. These women became my network, my support. We still meet. We still help each other. That is not in any indicator, but it is the most real thing the programme gave me.

This dimension of collective agency — what Freire (1970) might call the development of conscientisation through dialogic engagement with others — is precisely what is lost when programmes are restructured around individual competency certification. It is also, as Mayo (2015) argues, the dimension most resistant to institutional co-optation: genuine solidarity, once formed, does not require institutional approval to persist.

6. Final Considerations: Lessons for ALE Policy in the Global South

The trajectory of the Mulheres Mil Programme offers a set of lessons that extend beyond the Brazilian context, speaking to the broader international debate on how gender-focused ALE policies can sustain emancipatory practices under conditions of institutional and political pressure. These lessons are particularly relevant for the ESREA Network's agenda of widening the scope for action in ALE: they demonstrate both the possibility and the fragility

of transformative adult education policy in a context of neoliberal governance and political instability.

The first lesson concerns the importance of methodology as a site of political commitment. The MAPE methodology — with its valorisation of life histories, prior learning and community knowledge — was not merely a pedagogical technique but a political stance: a refusal of the banking model's assumption that women in vulnerable situations arrive at education empty-handed. The resilience of this methodology, even under the constraining conditions of Pronatec, demonstrates that feminist and Freirean pedagogical principles can survive institutional pressures when educators internalise them as professional values rather than merely implementing them as policy requirements. This finding supports Mayo's (2015) argument that counter-hegemonic adult education is ultimately sustained by the political commitments of educators, not only by enabling policy environments. It also suggests that investment in the professional formation of adult educators — particularly in feminist and critical pedagogical traditions — is one of the most durable contributions that ALE policy can make to the long-term sustainability of emancipatory programmes.

The second lesson concerns the relationship between scale and fidelity to transformative aims. The expansion of Mulheres Mil from a small-scale, contextualised pilot to a nationwide programme generated genuine reach but compromised depth. The standardisation required by national policy frameworks is inherently in tension with the contextualised, community-embedded practice that feminist pedagogy requires. This suggests that gender-focused ALE programmes may be most effective when implemented at a scale that preserves space for contextual adaptation — articulated within national frameworks for resource allocation and quality assurance, but not subjected to the homogenising pressures of centralised curriculum management and output-based accountability systems. The Canadian community college model that inspired the original Mulheres Mil design offers one example of how equity-oriented access programmes can combine national frameworks with local autonomy; the challenge is to translate that balance into the politically more contested terrain of Brazilian federal education governance.

The third lesson concerns the political vulnerability of feminist adult education programmes and the importance of building durable institutional anchors for their survival. The dismantling of Mulheres Mil's feminist character under post-2016 administrations illustrates what Milana and Holford (2014) describe as the contested terrain of ALE policy: emancipatory programmes built within progressive political conjunctures are inherently vulnerable to reversal when political conditions shift. Similar dynamics have been documented in gender-focused adult education programmes across the Global South (Stromquist, 2007, 2013). The most durable anchor for feminist pedagogical practice in the Brazilian case proved to be the professional culture of the Federal Institutes themselves — an institutional identity rooted in a mandate for social and territorial development that resisted, at least partially, the market-oriented reorientation of national training policy. Strengthening this institutional culture, through policies that protect the autonomy of Federal Institutes and invest in the formation of their educators, may be among the most important contributions that ALE policy can make to the long-term sustainability of programmes such as Mulheres Mil.

Finally, the Mulheres Mil experience demonstrates that the distinction between inclusion and emancipation is not merely theoretical but has profound practical consequences for the design and evaluation of ALE policy. Inclusion — understood as access to existing educational and labour market structures — can be pursued through instrumental, efficiency-oriented approaches. Emancipation — understood as the transformation of the conditions that produce exclusion — requires a different kind of policy: one that values collective agency over individual certification, that recognises structural barriers rather than responsibilising individuals for overcoming them, and that treats women's lived knowledge as an epistemological resource rather than a deficit to be corrected. The Mulheres Mil Programme, at its best, embodied this emancipatory vision. Recovering and sustaining that vision — in Brazil and in the many other countries where gender-focused adult education programmes face analogous pressures — remains an urgent task for ALE policy, practice and research.

References

Field, J. (2006). Lifelong Learning and the New Educational Order (2nd ed.). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum.

hooks, b. (1994). Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. New York: Routledge.

Mayo, P. (2015). Hegemony and Education under Neoliberalism: Insights from Gramsci. New York: Routledge.

Milana, M., & Holford, J. (Eds.). (2014). Adult Education Policy and the European Union: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Ministry of Education / SETEC. (2011). Chamada Pública MEC/SETEC 01/2011: Programa Mulheres Mil. Brasília: MEC.

Rubenson, K. (2006). The Nordic model of lifelong learning. Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 36(3), 327–341.

Schiedeck Soares de Souza, C. (2021). Brazilian Federal Institutes and Canadian Colleges: Sharing Experiences Internationally. Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 50(4), 87–99.

Scott, J. W. (1999). Gender and the Politics of History (rev. ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.

Silva, A. L. (2018). Proeja nos Institutos Federais: desafios atuais. Ensino em Foco, 1(1), 1–15.

Stromquist, N. P. (2007). Feminist Organizations and Social Transformation in Latin America. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Stromquist, N. P. (2013). Adult education of women for social transformation: Reviving the promise, continuing the struggle. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 138, 29–38.

Stromquist, N. P. (2015). Women's empowerment and education: Linking knowledge to transformative action. European Journal of Education, 50(3), 307–324.

World Bank. (2015). Sustaining Employment and Wage Gains in Brazil: A Skills and Jobs Agenda. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

Aline Rocha Santana da Silva, Sérgio Eduardo de Pinho Velho Wanderley, Carmen de Jesus Dores Cavaco

Trajectories of Black Women from Youth and Adult Education in the World of Work

Abstract

This article discusses the effects of the National Programme for the Integration of Professional Education with Basic Education in the Youth and Adult Education Modality (Proeja) on the professional lives of Black women in Brazil. Drawing on a broader qualitative investigation, the analysis focuses on four semi-structured interviews conducted with students and graduates of Colégio Pedro II, Rio de Janeiro. Guided by content analysis (Bardin, 2011) and an intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 2002; Akotirene, 2019), the study examines how gender, race, class and transsexuality shape trajectories of exclusion and resilience in the world of work. The findings reveal that Proeja functions not merely as a vocational training policy, but as a site of identity reconstruction and a mechanism for widening the scope of action available to historically marginalised women — a result with implications for Adult Learning and Education (ALE) policy beyond the Brazilian context.

Keywords: Intersectionality; Black Women; Adult Education; Proeja; ALE Policy.

1. Introduction

Adult Learning and Education (ALE) has long been understood as a field in tension between emancipatory ambitions and economic imperatives (Milana & Holford, 2014). As Rubenson (2006) argues, participation in adult education is not a neutral act but is deeply structured by social inequalities — including those of gender, race and class. These structural conditions become especially acute when compounded by the historical legacies of colonialism and slavery, as is the case for Black women in Brazil.

The history of women in education and work is a narrative of contested rights and gradual advances towards gender equality. For much of this history, women were excluded from formal education altogether. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in the eighteenth century, argued that women should be educated solely to be good wives and mothers (Rousseau, 2004). This view was challenged by figures such as Simone de Beauvoir (1980), who argued that education and work are decisive for women's emancipation. In the labour market, women's gains have been real but uneven: as Quirino (2012, p. 91) notes, "from the end of the nineteenth century, work in offices, shops, telephone exchanges and care professions was strongly feminised", yet such occupations remained concentrated in precarious, low-paid work.

Black women occupy an especially constrained position within these dynamics. Angela Davis (2016) demonstrates how enslaved Black women faced a double oppression — of gender and of race — whose legacies continue to shape contemporary working conditions. Djamila Ribeiro (2017) emphasises that the concentration of Black women in subordinate employment is the result of historically entrenched structural racism. Carla Akotirene (2019) explains how Black women occupy an intersection of oppressions that is particularly resistant to universal policy remedies. Lélia Gonzalez (1988) connects the history of slavery to the contemporary conditions of domestic labour performed by Black women, keeping colonial hierarchies alive in the present.

In this context, programmes such as Proeja — Brazil's National Programme for the Integration of Professional Education with Basic Education in the Youth and Adult Education Modality — represent an attempt to widen the scope for action available to historically excluded groups. Mayo (2015) argues that critical adult education, rooted in Freirean principles, can serve as a counter-hegemonic force capable of challenging the conditions that reproduce inequality. Whether Proeja fulfils this potential, and what barriers persist even for those who participate in it, are the central questions addressed in this article.

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with four Black women — students and graduates of Proeja at Colégio Pedro II, Rio de Janeiro — with the aim of understanding how

the programme has shaped their professional trajectories and what intersectional barriers they continue to face in the world of work.

2. Methodology

This study is grounded in a qualitative research design — understood as an approach that privileges the meanings, experiences and social positions of participants as the primary source of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative inquiry is particularly suited to the study of intersectional experience, as it resists the reduction of complex, overlapping social positions to measurable variables and instead attends to the specificity and texture of lived experience. The empirical data consist of four semi-structured interviews conducted with Black women who are students or graduates of Proeja at Colégio Pedro II, a federal educational institution with campuses across Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary instrument because they allow participants to narrate their own trajectories in their own terms, while enabling the researcher to pursue themes of theoretical relevance across cases (Kvale, 2009). Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, was conducted in person at the institution's premises, recorded with participants' informed consent and subsequently transcribed in full.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on the following criteria: self-identification as Black women; current or prior enrolment in Proeja at Colégio Pedro II; and willingness to participate. The four participants — identified throughout as E1, E2, E3 and E4 in order to preserve anonymity — represent a range of ages (19 to 51), family configurations, employment situations and gender identities (two cisgender women and two trans women). This diversity was deliberately sought in order to capture the breadth of intersectional experience within a shared social position of racial and class marginalisation, and to examine how transphobia further compounds the oppressions already faced by Black women.

Data were analysed using content analysis (Bardin, 2011), a systematic method that enables the identification of recurring themes, latent meanings and patterns across interview transcripts. The analytical process involved three stages: pre-analysis, in which transcripts were read in full to identify initial impressions and emergent themes; exploratory coding, in which units of meaning were named and organised into thematic categories; and interpretation, in which categories were read against the intersectional theoretical framework and existing literature. The intersectionality framework developed by Crenshaw (2002) and extended by Akotirene (2019) served as the primary analytical lens, enabling examination of how overlapping axes of oppression — gender, race, class and transsexuality — shape the participants' experiences in and beyond formal education. This approach is consistent with the call by Grotlüschen et al. (2024) for ALE research to engage with the political and structural dimensions of educational exclusion, rather than treating participation as a purely individual matter.

3. Intersectionality, ALE Policy and the World of Work

The concept of intersectionality, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (2002), provides the theoretical foundation for this study. Crenshaw defines it as "a conceptualisation of the problem that seeks to capture the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination" (p. 177). Originally elaborated in the context of US anti-discrimination law, intersectionality has since been adopted as a key analytical tool across the social sciences and has proven especially productive in critical ALE scholarship, enabling researchers to examine how educational exclusion is produced and sustained through the simultaneous operation of multiple social hierarchies (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2018; Grotlüschen et al., 2024).

From an ALE policy perspective, Rubenson (2006) demonstrates that participation in adult education tends to reproduce social stratification rather than disrupt it, since those most in need of education are least likely to access it — a dynamic he terms the "Matthew effect". This structural bias is particularly pronounced for women from racially marginalised groups, whose participation in formal adult education remains systematically lower than that of their white counterparts. Field (2006) extends this critique by arguing that lifelong learning policies frequently serve to responsibilise individuals for their own exclusion, obscuring the structural conditions that produce inequality and placing the burden of social mobility on those least positioned to carry it.

These critiques are especially pertinent in the Brazilian context, where EJA — the broader modality of which Proeja is a part — has historically been treated as a compensatory policy rather than a right, chronically underfunded and positioned as a second-chance system rather than an integral component of the public education offer (Silva, 2018). Proeja, launched in 2006, represents an attempt to address this deficit by integrating professional qualification with basic education within the EJA framework, thus enabling participants to obtain both a secondary-level credential and vocational training concurrently. Its implementation within federal institutions such as Colégio Pedro II confers a degree of institutional stability and resource that is largely absent from the broader EJA landscape; yet, as this study demonstrates, even this more robust version of adult education encounters the limits of what educational policy can achieve in isolation from wider social transformation.

Milana and Holford (2014) argue that ALE policy must be understood as a terrain of contestation between competing interests, in which emancipatory aspirations are routinely subordinated to economic agendas. This tension is particularly visible in the case of Black women, for whom access to professional qualification is simultaneously a strategy for economic survival and a potential site of empowerment. The question, as Mayo (2015) poses it, is whether adult education can sustain its counter-hegemonic vocation under conditions of increasing pressure from neoliberal and conservative political forces. Akotirene (2018, p. 58) argues that "intersectionality is, above all, an analytical lens on structural interaction in its political and legal effects." Applied to ALE policy, this lens reveals how universal programmes — designed without attention to the compounded disadvantages faced by Black women — frequently fail to reach those who need them most, or offer access without enabling genuine participation and progression.

4. Participants and Their Trajectories

Interviewee E1 is 50 years old, a cisgender woman, married, with a 19-year-old daughter studying Education. She is in the second year of Proeja at Colégio Pedro II — Tijuca II campus and runs a small handmade jewellery business. Interviewee E2 is 51 years old, a cisgender woman, married and mother of three. She completed Proeja at the Centro campus in 2022 and currently works as an administrative assistant. Interviewee E3 is 19 years old, a trans woman, single and without children. She left Proeja in 2022 after passing the national secondary equivalence examination (Encceja) and entering university, where she studies International Relations and Marketing while working in the marketing team of a cosmetics multinational. Interviewee E4 is 32 years old, a trans woman, single and without children, currently in the second year of Proeja at the Tijuca II campus and working as a domestic worker.

EJA students are citizens who were denied the right to education at a specific point in their lives — whether because they needed to work to support their households, because they were constrained by oppressive relationships, or because the educational system failed to meet their needs. As Arroyo (2014) argues, these are not people who simply missed out on schooling by chance; they are the structurally marginalised — women, the poor, Black people, rural workers — whose exclusion from education reflects and reproduces their exclusion from broader social participation. In Rubenson's (2006) terms, they are precisely the group least served by universal lifelong learning policies, yet most in need of targeted, rights-based educational provision. The EJA modality, and Proeja within it, therefore carries a reparatory charge that distinguishes it from mainstream adult education: it exists, at least in its foundational rationale, to redress a specific and ongoing historical injustice.

All four participants entered the labour market in adolescence, driven by financial necessity rather than vocational aspiration:

> E1: My mother became a civil servant, but she earned very little, so she rented a house on her own. So my sister and I worked to help her at home, to help pay for electricity and rent, because she was a single mother. At that time I was out of school. I could have been studying, doing other things, but I had to work to help my mother.
>
> E2: Since I came from a very poor family, I myself sought a source of income at age 13, even to help the family at home, because we were going through a lot of hardship. [...] I got pregnant at 17 and had the baby when I was around 18. Because of the pregnancy I left school, and then I had to look for work because I needed to support my daughter, and I couldn't go back to school at that point.
>
> E3: My first professional experience was at 14, when I was an apprentice at Caixa Econômica Federal. I actually entered the corporate world out of financial necessity. But also because I always recognised the importance of having a good academic and professional path, and how

> much of a difference that makes in our lives.
>
> E4: My first professional experience was at 17. I worked at a market stall in São Luís, Maranhão. I used to set up and take down the stall to sell retail.

These accounts illustrate what Fenwick (2006) describes as work-learning under conditions of compulsion rather than choice — where entry into the labour market is not a developmental opportunity but a structural necessity produced by poverty and the absence of social protection. The early interruption of schooling, driven by economic need and in some cases by pregnancy, reflects the gendered and racialised conditions that Gonzalez (1988) and Davis (2016) identify as enduring legacies of colonial exploitation. Returning to education through Proeja, in this light, is not simply a matter of acquiring new skills: it is an act of reclaiming a trajectory that structural forces had already foreclosed.

5. Intersectional Oppressions in the World of Work

The participants' accounts consistently reveal how gender, race, class and transsexuality intersect to produce compounded forms of exclusion in the labour market. As Boyadjieva and Ilieva-Trichkova (2018) argue, access to adult education does not automatically translate into equitable labour market outcomes when structural discrimination remains unaddressed. The following testimonies illustrate this pattern:

> E1: Black women always go through everything. Sometimes you go to an interview somewhere, you compete for a position and you usually don't get it because of your colour, your profile. It's very difficult to get a good position. Black women suffer a lot more than lighter-skinned women. I wish there were rules, something specifically aimed at this group — Black women everywhere, but with equality. Because Black women really do suffer more.
>
> E4: White trans women, white trans men — they will suffer because of their transness. But a Black trans woman will suffer doubly because of race: she is both Black and trans. So the suffering is greater, and she is also marginalised, because for society, every Black person is a criminal. It's sad, but that's the reality they live by, unfortunately.

These testimonies resonate with Crenshaw's (2002) argument that the specific experience of Black women cannot be captured by frameworks that address race or gender in isolation. Hooks (2000) further emphasises that Black women face a form of marginalisation that is qualitatively distinct from that experienced by white women or Black men. For trans Black women, this compounding is intensified by transphobia, as the accounts of E3 and E4 make clear:

> E3: In 2021, I got a place at CEFET. And then, on my way back from school, I had to stop studying because I was sexually abused on the metro. I didn't have the courage to continue secondary school. It was something that really blocked me — I couldn't go to school anymore. I had to stop for several months. Then I managed to get a place in Proeja at Colégio Pedro II. I think men, most of the time, see us trans women as the easiest prey in a sexual sense — they're so used to seeing us in a context of invisibility, on street corners.
>
> E4: We are seen as easy prey by men. We are seen as objects of fetish. So trans women suffer even more than trans men in this sense.

The exclusion of Black women from dignified formal employment is evident across all four accounts. When employment is obtained, it is frequently accompanied by unrecognised additional responsibilities, wage theft and systematically blocked mobility. These are not isolated incidents of individual prejudice but expressions of what Ribeiro (2017) describes as structural racism in the labour market — a system that extracts value from Black women's labour while denying them the protections, recognition and advancement their work warrants:

> E1: At 22, I got a position as a store manager at a shopping centre in Jacarepaguá, and I stayed there for about 10 years. They called me a 'responsible salesperson', but I was responsible for everything — payments, receiving customer money, managing stock. On my employment card they put 'salesperson' but gave me manager responsibilities. When I left, I couldn't claim anything because the owner hadn't been making my social security and FGTS contributions.
>
> E2: Sometimes you were there among white people at a job interview, and you could see that the white people got through, and you, as a Black woman, didn't.
>
> E3: Women are often inside the corporate environment but have no active voice. Black women have historically not been part of management spaces, and when they do enter, they enter at lower levels. The executive, decision-making spaces are occupied by white men.

When excluded from the formal labour market altogether, Black women are driven towards informal and precarious alternatives. E1 is an entrepreneur by necessity rather than choice. E3 and E4 highlight the near-total exclusion of trans women from formal employment:

> E3: I think 98% of trans women actually work informally because there is no space for them in formal corporate environments.
>
> E4: It is difficult for a trans woman to find formal employment. They are normally driven towards informal and risky work, because they are marginalised by society.

These findings are consistent with what Grotlüschen et al. (2024) identify as the political pressure on ALE to serve economic agendas while neglecting the most marginalised groups, and with Field's (2006) critique of lifelong learning policies that responsibilise individuals without addressing the structural conditions that produce exclusion. The situation of trans Black women in particular exposes the limits of an ALE policy framework that remains largely gender-binary in its conception: programmes designed to empower women do not automatically address the specific and compounded vulnerabilities of trans women of colour, for whom the transition from informal to formal employment requires not merely qualifications but a transformation of institutional culture and social attitudes.

6. Final Considerations

This study set out to examine the effects of Proeja on the professional trajectories of Black women and to identify the intersectional barriers that persist even for those who participate in adult education. The findings point simultaneously in two directions: towards the real, if limited, transformative potential of the programme, and towards the structural depth of the inequalities it cannot resolve alone.

The participants reported meaningful gains in autonomy, self-esteem and professional competencies as a result of Proeja. For E2, the programme was directly linked to obtaining formal employment in her area of qualification. For E3, it provided an institutional foothold — alongside the Encceja certification — that ultimately led to university entrance and corporate employment. These outcomes confirm what Mayo (2015) argues about critical adult education: that it can function as a counter-hegemonic force when grounded in the lived realities of marginalised learners. In Freirean terms (Freire, 1987), the programme enabled these women to begin recognising themselves as rights-bearing subjects capable of naming and resisting the conditions of their own exclusion — an outcome not to be underestimated for women who have spent years in unrecognised, informal and underpaid work.

However, the accounts also make clear that Proeja alone cannot dismantle the intersectional structures that govern access to the labour market. Even after completing the programme, participants continue to face racialised hiring discrimination, occupational devaluation, wage theft and, in the case of trans women, near-total exclusion from formal employment. The experience of E1 — assigned managerial responsibilities while contracted and paid as a salesperson, then denied her social security contributions upon leaving — illustrates what Hirata (2016) describes as the dual labour market in which Black women are systematically confined to the lower tier regardless of their qualifications or performance. These findings support Rubenson's (2006) argument that adult education participation, without structural change in the labour market and in social policy, tends to reproduce rather than disrupt existing inequalities.

The situation of trans Black women, as represented by E3 and E4, deserves particular attention. Their accounts reveal a compounding of oppressions — transphobia, racism and class marginalisation — that places them at a near-total remove from the formal labour market. The sexual violence experienced by E3 in public transport, which interrupted her secondary education, is not an aberration but a structural feature of the environment faced by trans women of colour. That she ultimately re-entered education and obtained formal employment speaks to exceptional resilience, but cannot serve as evidence that the system functions equitably. As Lorde (1983) argues, the coexistence of multiple, distinct oppressions demands strategies of solidarity and structural transformation, not individual success narratives.

From an ALE policy perspective, these findings point to the need for what Boyadjieva and Ilieva-Trichkova (2018) describe as a social justice approach to adult learning — one that goes beyond access to address the conditions under which learning translates, or fails to translate, into equitable outcomes. Milana and Holford (2014) argue that ALE policy must be understood as a terrain of contestation between competing interests; the case of Proeja illustrates this clearly, as a programme embedded within a broader social context that continues to marginalise the very women it seeks to serve. Field's (2006) critique of responsibilising discourses in lifelong learning is equally pertinent: the structural barriers documented in this study cannot be overcome by expecting individual women to compensate for them through educational participation alone.

Widening the scope for action for Black women in Brazil requires not only the strengthening and expansion of programmes such as Proeja, but their articulation with anti-racist, feminist and trans-inclusive social and labour market policies that address the compounded vulnerabilities these women face across multiple institutional domains. This conclusion speaks directly to the broader agenda of the ESREA Network on Policy Studies in Adult Education: the scope for action in ALE can only be genuinely widened when policy attends to the intersectional realities of those most systematically excluded from its benefits. Research that centres the voices and trajectories of Black trans and cisgender women — as this study has sought to do — represents one contribution towards that collective goal.

References

Akotirene, C. (2019). Interseccionalidade. São Paulo: Sueli Carneiro/Polén.

Arroyo, M. G. (2014). Outros Sujeitos, Outras Pedagogias (2nd ed.). Petrópolis: Vozes.

Bardin, L. (2011). Content Analysis. São Paulo: Edições 70.

Beauvoir, S. de (1980). The Second Sex. New York: Vintage Books.

Boyadjieva, P., & Ilieva-Trichkova, P. (2018). Adult education as a common good: Conceptualisation and measurement. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 37(3), 345–358.

Bruschini, C., & Lombardi, M. R. (2003). Mulheres e homens no mercado de trabalho brasileiro: um retrato dos anos 1990. In M. Maruani & H. Hirata (Eds.), As novas fronteiras da desigualdade. São Paulo: SENAC.

Crenshaw, K. (2002). Documento para o encontro de especialistas em aspectos da discriminação racial relativos ao gênero. Revista Estudos Feministas, 10, 171–188.

Davis, A. (2016). Women, Race and Class. London: Penguin.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Fenwick, T. (2006). Work, learning and adult education in Canada. In T. Fenwick, T. Nesbit, & B. Spencer (Eds.), Contexts of Adult Education: Canadian Perspectives (pp. 187–200). Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing.

Field, J. (2006). Lifelong Learning and the New Educational Order (2nd ed.). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Freire, P. (1987). Pedagogy of the Oppressed (32nd ed.). Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.

Gonzalez, L. (1988). Por um feminismo afro-latino-americano. São Paulo: Zahar.

Grotlüschen, A., Belzer, A., Ertner, M., & Yasukawa, K. (2024). The role of adult learning and education in the Sustainable Development Goals. International Review of Education, 70, 205–221.

Hirata, H. (2016). Mulheres brasileiras: relações de classe, de raça e de gênero no mundo do trabalho. Confins, 26, 1–13.

Hooks, B. (2000). Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center. London: Pluto Press.

Jesus, C. de (1960). Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada. São Paulo.

Kvale, S. (2009). InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Lorde, A. (1983). There is no hierarchy of oppressions. Bulletin: Homophobia and Education, 14(3/4), 9.

Mayo, P. (2015). Hegemony and Education under Neoliberalism: Insights from Gramsci. New York: Routledge.

Milana, M., & Holford, J. (Eds.). (2014). Adult Education Policy and the European Union: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Oliveira, C. G., & Wanderley, S. E. P. V. (2022). Subalterno pode escrever! Uma contribuição

decolonial e interseccional na obra de Carolina Maria de Jesus para os estudos organizacionais. Revista Eletrônica de Ciência Administrativa, 21(2), 242–274.

Quirino, R. (2012). Trabalho da mulher no Brasil nos últimos 40 anos. Revista Tecnologia e Sociedade, 8(15), 90–102.

Ribeiro, D. (2017). O que é lugar de fala? Belo Horizonte: Letramento.

Rousseau, J.-J. (2004). Emílio, ou da educação. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Rubenson, K. (2006). The Nordic model of lifelong learning. Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 36(3), 327–341.

Santos, P., & Silva, G. (2020). Os Sujeitos da EJA nas Pesquisas em Educação de Jovens e Adultos. Educação & Realidade, 45(2), 1–21.

Silva, A. L. (2018). Proeja nos Institutos Federais: desafios atuais. Ensino em Foco, 1(1), 1–15.

Silva, N. R. S. (2023). Educação de Jovens e Adultos e seus Sujeitos: Breves Reflexões. In M. A. B. Oliveira (Ed.), EJA em Foco. Serrinha: IFBaiano.

Kristin Skowranek (Universität Hamburg)

Digital Participation in Europe: Comparing Adults with Low Literacy to Adults with Higher Literacy in 9 Countries

Keywords: Low Literacy, Digital Literacy, Digital Divide, PIAAC

The proliferation of digital devices has transformed communication and information access in contemporary society. However, the European Commission determined that European countries vary in their levels of digital development (European Commission, 2022) which leads to different policies according to digitization. While digital devices are increasingly integral to everyday life and civic participation, adults with low literacy skills could face significant barriers in accessing and effectively utilizing these technologies. Understanding how adults with low literacy engage with digital devices across different national contexts is crucial for developing inclusive policies and support systems that promote equitable digital participation.

Based on the Practice Engagement Theory (Reder, 1994), the acquisition of literacy is carried out through participation in literacy practices. Access to digital applications is therefore crucial for developing digital literacy. However, according to the concept of the digital divide (Dijk, 2020), not everyone has the same opportunity to access digital devices, applications, and the internet.

Data from a national assessment (LEO 2018) shows that for the German-speaking population aged 18 to 64, adults with low literacy use digital devices regularly (Buddeberg & Grotlüschen, 2020). Audio-visual practices, like voice messages or video tutorials, are used more frequently by people with low literacy than by people with higher literacy (Buddeberg & Grell, 2023). As adults with low literacy tend to replace written digital practices with audio-visual digital practices, they might be affected by forms of the digital divide (Dijk, 2020).

Drawing on data from the *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC) 2023 (OECD, 2024), this contribution examines the extent of digital participation among adults with low literacy skills compared to adults with higher literacy skills in nine European Countries with varying levels of digital development.

Results show that the first digital divide (Dijk, 2020) is closing in countries with a high level of digital development due to the high usage rate of smartphones. But there is still a gap between adults with low literacy and adults with higher literacy skills in less developed countries. Adults with low literacy also use digital devices less often for digital practices than adults with higher literacy skills. This leads to the conclusion that closing the second digital divide (Dijk, 2020) remains a task for policymakers and adult education.

References

Buddeberg, K., & Grell, P. (2023). Audiovisuelle Praktiken als Erweiterung kommunikativer und informativer Handlungsfähigkeit. In A. Grotlüschen, K. Buddeberg, & H. Solga (Eds.), *Interdisziplinäre Analysen zur LEO Studie 2018 – Leben mit geringer Literalität: Vertiefende Erkenntnisse zur Rolle des Lesens und Schreibens im Erwachsenenalter: Vol. Band 14* (pp. 37–63). Springer VS.

Buddeberg, K., & Grotlüschen, A. (2020). Literalität, digitale Praktiken und Grundkompetenzen. In A. Grotlüschen & K. Buddeberg (Eds.), *LEO 2018 – Leben mit geringer Literalität* (pp. 197–225). wbv.

Dijk, J. van. (2020). *The Digital Divide*. Polity.

European Commission. (2022). *Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022. Germany*. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/digital-economy-and-society-index-desi-2022 [22.04.25]

OECD. (2024). Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Public Use File (prgdeup1.sav). Paris: OECD Publishing.

Reder, S. (1994). Practice-Engagement Theory: A Sociocultural Approach to Literacy Across Languages and Cultures. In B. M. Ferdman, R.-M. Weber, & A. G. Ramirez (Eds), *Literacy across languages and cultures* (pp. 33–70). State University of New York Press.

Centers of Vocational Excellence – policy tool facilitating reskilling and upskilling.

Magdalena Smak (IBE PIB)

Key words: VET, adult learning, cooperation between schools and employers

We are currently experiencing numerous changes in the labor market. Automation processes are reducing jobs for unskilled workers but increasing those for skilled workers. AI is also taking away some positions from accounting, advertising, and other industries. Therefore, many groups need a mechanism for rapid and effective retraining. In Poland, one of the tools of state policy in this regard are Centers for Vocational excellence, established in 2023 as a New part of educational ecosystem.

I will present the results of an evaluation of the implementation of these institutions. This is an ongoing evaluation, as state funding for these facilities bas begun in 2023 and is still active. I adopt a realistic evaluation approach (Pawson, Tilley, 1997), which aims to explain the social context in which the centers are opened, the mechanisms by which people respond to the intervention, and the planned and unplanned effects of the intervention. The study consisted of two stages: first, desk research, consisting of analyses of the program's documents, the centers' websites, and secondary data regarding the centers' business profile. Additionally, a case study was conducted at one facility and interviews with the management staff of the five-centers were conducted. While funding for adult education is being cut in many countries, Poland has launched a €357 million program to build and equip modern vocational education centers, whose services will be aimed at students, graduates, and adults.

Each center has a program council composed of industry organizations relevant to the given professional field, employers, including those from the SME sector, regional and local government bodies (district and provincial labor market councils), the institution's governing body, teachers, and other staff conducting classes at the CoVE. This ensures the flow of information, skills, and technology between schools and businesses. The analysis yields interesting conclusions: partnerships established recently, only to participate in the program, are less sustainable. The effectiveness in implementing this project depends on previous ties and successful collaborations — for example, between a vocational school and a regional factory. Another mechanism ensuring the effective implementation of a new educational unit is supporting the local labor market, such as training and courses in electronics and mechanics offered by CoVE in the city where the rolling stock factory is located; in the city that serves as a warehouse hub, logistics courses are offered in the center. These conclusions can be helpful in counteracting the implementation gap in similar projects co-financed by the EU.

Lifelong Learning Under Time Pressure: The Temporal Turn as a Lens on European and Flemish Policy Discourses

Jorie Soltic (KU Leuven)

Keywords
Lifelong Learning; Social Acceleration; Temporal Turn; Education Policy; Adult Learning

Abstract
This paper examines how the recent *temporal turn* in the humanities - and particularly Hartmut Rosa's theory of social acceleration - can enrich policy studies in Adult Learning and Education (ALE). Whereas much research on ALE has highlighted issues of access, equity, and funding, the temporal dimension of current lifelong learning discourse has received little systematic attention (Brandi et al. 2024). Yet temporality constitutes a structurally determining but underexplored dimension in how ALE is currently conceptualised in European and Flemish contexts.

The central objective of this contribution is therefore twofold: (1) to make visible how temporal logics function in contemporary ALE policy and practice, and (2) to critically interrogate how these logics affect the aims and meanings ascribed to ALE. By introducing the lens of social acceleration (Rosa 2013), the paper seeks to widen the scope for action in ALE research, policy, and practice by questioning the implicit time regimes that underpin dominant narratives.

The paper is grounded in a discursive analysis of recent European and Flemish lifelong learning policy documents - including the European Skills Agenda, the Pact for Skills, Council Recommendations on Individual Learning Accounts, and the Flemish policy note '*Education & Training 2024–29'* – complemented with insights from practice at PUC - KU Leuven Continue, one of the largest providers of university-based lifelong learning in Flanders. This qualitative analysis focuses on how key policy texts frame technological change, competency forecasting, and employability, and how these framings resonate in the design and uptake of lifelong learning programs in higher education.

The significance of this study for policy research in ALE lies in its conceptual and critical intervention. By foregrounding temporality as a key analytical category, it demonstrates how acceleration pressures shape not only the design of LLL policies but also their practical consequences for learners and providers. It further suggests that recognising these time regimes is essential if ALE is to resist being confined to narrow, neoliberal definitions of employability and to reclaim its potential for emancipation, meaning-making, and democratic reflection.

In conclusion, the paper argues that widening the scope for action in ALE requires not only counterstrategies against authoritarian and neoliberal pressures but also critical

reflection on the temporal logics that underpin current discourses. Alternative approaches, such as *slow pedagogy* (Mousena & Raptis 2024), may offer ways to reintroduce slowness, openness, and deeper formation into adult education.

References

Brandi, U., Hodge, S., Hoggan-Kloubert, T., Milana, M., & Morris, T. H. (2024). Temporality and lifelong education and learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 44*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2025.2445435

Decuypere, M., & Vanden Broeck, P. (2020). Time and educational (re-)forms—Inquiring the temporal dimension of education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory.* https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1716449

European Commission. (2016). *Upskilling pathways: New opportunities for adults.*

European Commission. (2020). *Pact for skills.*

European Commission. (2022). *Council recommendation on individual learning accounts* (COM 243/03). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(03)

Mousena, E., & Raptis, N. (2024). Perspective chapter: Slow pedagogy approach vs hurried schooling in early childhood. In *Contemporary issues in early childhood education and care.* https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1007434

OECD. (2019). *OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030: Conceptual learning framework.* Paris: OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/projects/edu/education-2040/concept-notes/Skills_for_2030_concept_note.pdf

Rosa, H. (2013). *Social acceleration: A new theory of modernity.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Negotiating Inclusion: A Case Study of Italy’s Migrant Adult Education Policies

Peri Tutar, *Verona Un)vers)ty, Department of Human Science,* peri.tutarcinar@univr.it
Marcella Milana, *Verona Un)vers)ty, Department of Human Science,* marcella.milana@unlvr.lt
Francesca Lasi, CPIA 2 Varese “Tullio De Mauro”, francesca.lasi@gmail.com

Immigration has become a very complex policy area that affects the immigrants and the receiving country in many ways, economically, socially, politically, culturally and demographically (Şemşit, 2018). In today's world, which can be described as the age of migration (Castles & Miller, 1998), adult education has great responsibilities in ensuring that immigrants adapt to their new lives. Migration has changed the demographics and socio-cultural structure of the societies we live in, as well as having profound effects on lifelong learning (Guo, 2013). The role of adult education has long been on the agenda in Europe and other immigrant-receiving countries. It has been about how adult education can support immigrants in their adaptation to their new country of residence and the knowledge and competencies expected from immigrants.

The aim of this study is to examine Italy's adult migrant education policy in terms of its objectives, targets and opportunities based on policy documents. This research adopts an explanatory case study design (Yin, 2003) to examine Italy’s policy framework for adult immigrants. Italy was selected as the case due to its significant migration flows and the dual role of its adult education system, which is both shaped by these dynamics and responsible for providing learning opportunities for migrants. To this end, a purposive selection of policy documents was undertaken. These documents are three decrees regulating the CPIA (*Centri Provinciali per l’Istruzione degli Adulti* / Provincial Centres for Adult Education) system and three laws on migration and security. The selected Italian policy documents were examined using a qualitative content analysis approach. The analytical process followed the steps outlined by Roumell (2024). The coding and thematic development were conducted iteratively by the researchers, with repeated reviews to maintain internal consistency and analytical transparency.

Consequently, it has been observed that Italy's adult education policy for migrants is largely shaped around the Security Package (2009) and Integration Agreement (2011) which fundamental laws in Italy that require foreigners to take language and citizenship courses. The Security Package links the granting of an EU long-term residence permit to the applicant passing an Italian language exam at A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This Package also refers to a credit-based Integration

Agreement, which must be signed by foreigners entering the country, with some exceptions. The signing of the Integration Agreement, defined as a credit-based system, is specified as a prerequisite for the granting of a residence permit. These credits include learning Italian at the A2 oral level and participating in citizenship training. Overall, these laws have influenced not only the procedures governing migrants' residence permits but also the structural reform of Italy's adult education system, playing a significant role in the transformation of the CPIAs. Although the stated aim is to promote language integration and civic participation, this design may inadvertently make integration a procedural requirement, thereby increasing the pressure on individuals struggling with the social, economic and psychological challenges of adapting to a new country. A similar trend can be seen in the increasing prevalence of citizenship and language requirements across Europe. This signals a shift from multicultural and inclusion-focused policies towards more conditional, security-oriented approaches. This study examines the Italian example within broader European trends and proposes more flexible, supportive and rights-based models that could improve integration outcomes while also protecting the right to education.

Keywords: migrant education, L2 learning, civic education, integration policy, Italy, case study

REFERENCES

Castles, S., & Miller, M. J. (1998). *The age of migration*. Macmillan Education UK.

Guo, S. (2013). Introduction. In S. Guo (Ed.), *Transnational migration and lifelong learning: Global issues and perspectives.* Oxon: Routledge.

Roumell, E. A. (2024). Qualitative content analysis in adult education policy research: Developing a coding framework and conducting categorical analysis. In M. Milana, P. Rasmussen, & M. Bussi (Eds.), *Research handbook on adult education policy* (pp. 41-53). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Şemşit, S. (2018). *Avrupa Birliği Politikaları Bağlamında Uluslararası Göç Olgusu ve Türleri: Kavramsal Bakış.* Yönetim ve Ekonomi, 25(1), 269-289.

Yin, R. K. (2002). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Conference paper (work in progress, do not quote)

Different definitions of citizenship and models of citizenship education – a systematic literature review

Zeinab Yazdizadeh & Jyri Manninen
University of Eastern Finland

Abstract

This paper contributes to discussions on citizenship, citizenship education, and adult education policies in the context of increasing migration, which makes citizenship a complex and multi-dimensional concept. While citizenship education is often used as a tool for integration and inclusion, mainstream civic education mainly focuses on native citizens participation in basic democratic processes, addressing issues like declining civic engagement and trust in public institutions. Two systematic literature reviews were done: one on the definitions and meanings of citizenship, and another on models of citizenship education. The findings suggest that citizenship is a contested concept comprising four dimensions: legal status, rights, participation, and identity. Together with Banks's (2017b) typology (failed, recognized, participatory, and transformative citizenship) a conceptual base was created to analyse different types of citizenship education. Based on the results, it is argued that in the context of migration, citizenship education policies grounded in democracy and social justice should prioritize transformative and multicultural approaches. For example, public pedagogy (Biesta, 2012) highlights the importance of learning beyond formal education in fostering democratic citizenship.

Keywords: citizenship, citizenship education, immigrants, systematic literature review

1 Introduction

Immigration and the large-scale, rapid movement of diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups within and across nation-states is nowadays a key factor that affects the notions of citizenship (Brubaker, 1992; Banks 2017a,b). Due to different reasons including the existence of digital media migratory movements have led to the enhancement of "cultural plurality" and the formation of "hybrid identities" (Delgado-Algarra et al., 2019, p. 166), which constitutes a condition of superdiversity. As a result, the well-known traditional Marshallian definition of citizenship as a status based on the assumption of the homogeneity of the nation-state (Marshal 1950), aiming at equality, is under question for creating inequality within society (Joppke, 2010), and has made many scholars to discuss the notion of citizenship through various aspects of perception.

Aligned to the transformations on the ways citizenship is approached, the issue of citizenship education has also been viewed in different ways. Following the Marshallian notion of citizenship, the aim of citizenship education in most nation-states was to educate citizens “who internalized national values, venerated national heroes, and accepted glorified versions of national histories” (Banks, 2017a, p. xxvii). The aim of citizenship education for immigrants was assimilation, an extreme form of acculturation expecting immigrants to take the dominant culture and forget about their culture of origin. In addition, “mainstream civic education” focusses mainly on native citizens participation in basic democratic processes by trying to solve the problems like decline in civic participation, diminishing electoral engagement and increasing distrust in public institutions (f. ex. Borhan, 2025).

The aim of this article is to provide the implications from two literature reviews (on the concept of citizenship, and different types of citizenship education) for policy makers and adult educators in the era of increasing migration, and make suggestions to rethink adult education beyond the hegemonic view of current lifelong learning policies and invite the educators to consider the importance of politics of citizenship more than before.

2 Research questions and methodology

Our literature review aims to provide clarity on the concepts of citizenship and citizenship education. Clarification of the definitions and meanings of citizenship and citizenship education will help to identify and develop alternative models and policies of adult education, which could support democracy and social justice. The following research questions guide the literature review and its analysis:

1. What are the meanings and definitions of "citizenship"?
2. What are the definitions and different models of “citizenship education” (with a focus on immigrants)?

Systematic literature review was used as a data collection and analysis method. It is based on detailed documentation of the search and leads to less biased results. Table 1 provides the description of the search done for the review:

Table 1: Summary of search description

Search Descrip-tions	Resource	Search String	Years Cov-ered	Other Refinements
Search 1	Google Scholar	"meaning of citizenship"	2017-2020	Peer reviewed & Full Text available articles
Search 2	Google Scholar	"definition of citizenship"	2017-2020	Peer reviewed & Full Text available articles
Search 3	Google Scholar	"citizenship education for immigrants" OR "citizenship education for migrants" OR "citizenship education for refugees" OR "citizenship education for newcomers"	2014-2020 *	Peer reviewed & Full Text available articles
Search 4	Google scholar	"citizenship education for" AND (immigrants OR migrants OR refugees OR newcomers)	2017-2020	Peer reviewed & Full Text available articles
Search 5	UEF Library Catalogue	"handbook" AND "citizenship"	Any Year	------------
Search 6	UEF Library Catalogue	"citizenship education" AND "migration"	Any Year	------------

*The time period was extended, since the number of search results for 2017-2020 was limited.

The four-phase flow diagram from PRISMA website is used to document the data collection processing of this systematic literature review. The diagram below (Figure 1) describes an example of how the searches were done to answer the first research question. Similar has been done for the second research question.

In total, 128 articles met the criteria for full-text review. Of these, 91 articles (16 addressing the first research question and 75 the second) were included in the final analysis, forming the basis of the results chapter.

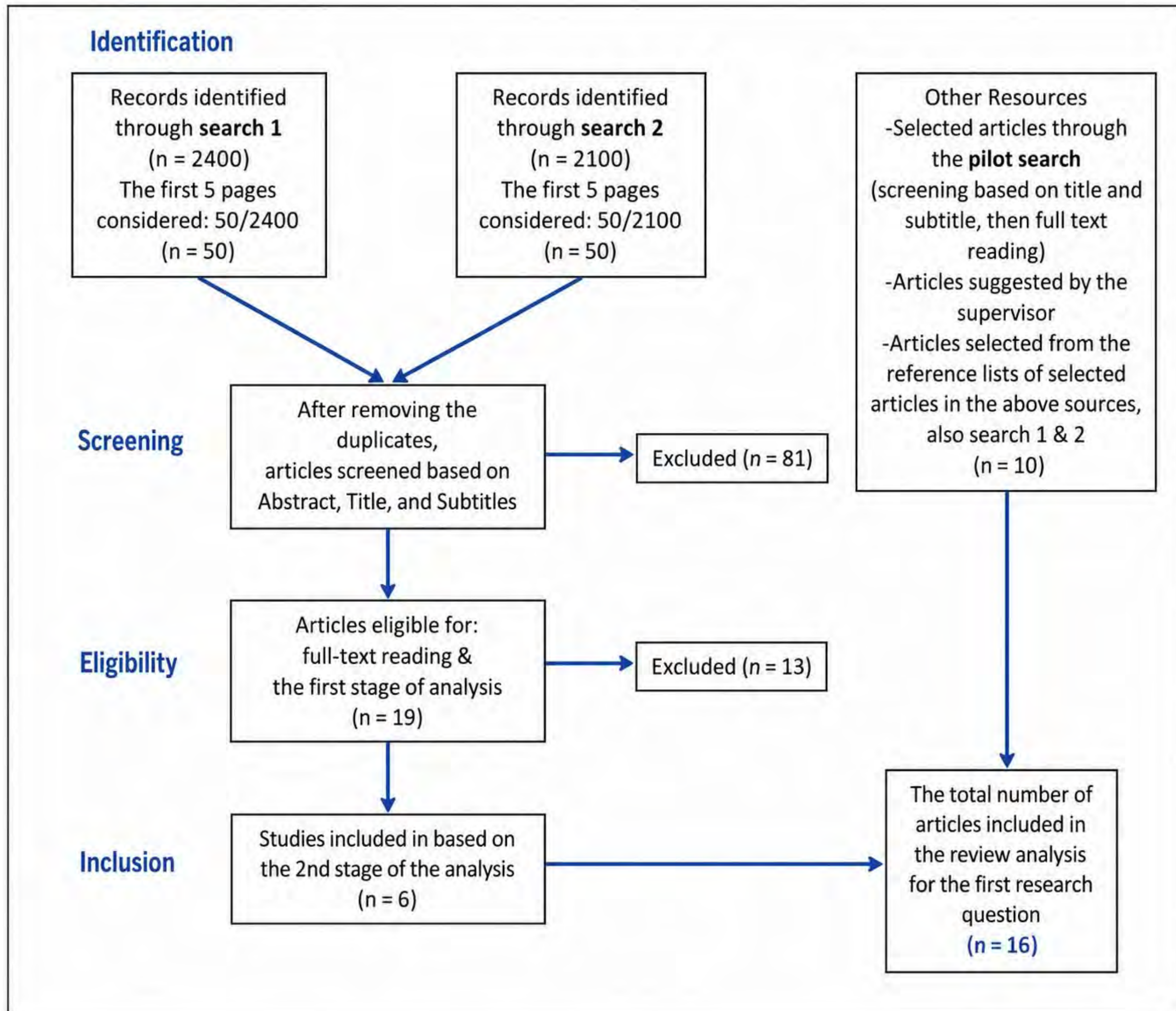


Figure 1: Phases of literature search for the first research question

3 Results

The diagram below presents the results of the two literature reviews. These findings are discussed separately in chapters 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3. This paper does not present all results; instead, it selectively focuses on those most relevant for policymakers and adult educators in designing different kinds of citizenship education that support the values of democracy and social justice and promote the social inclusion of immigrants.

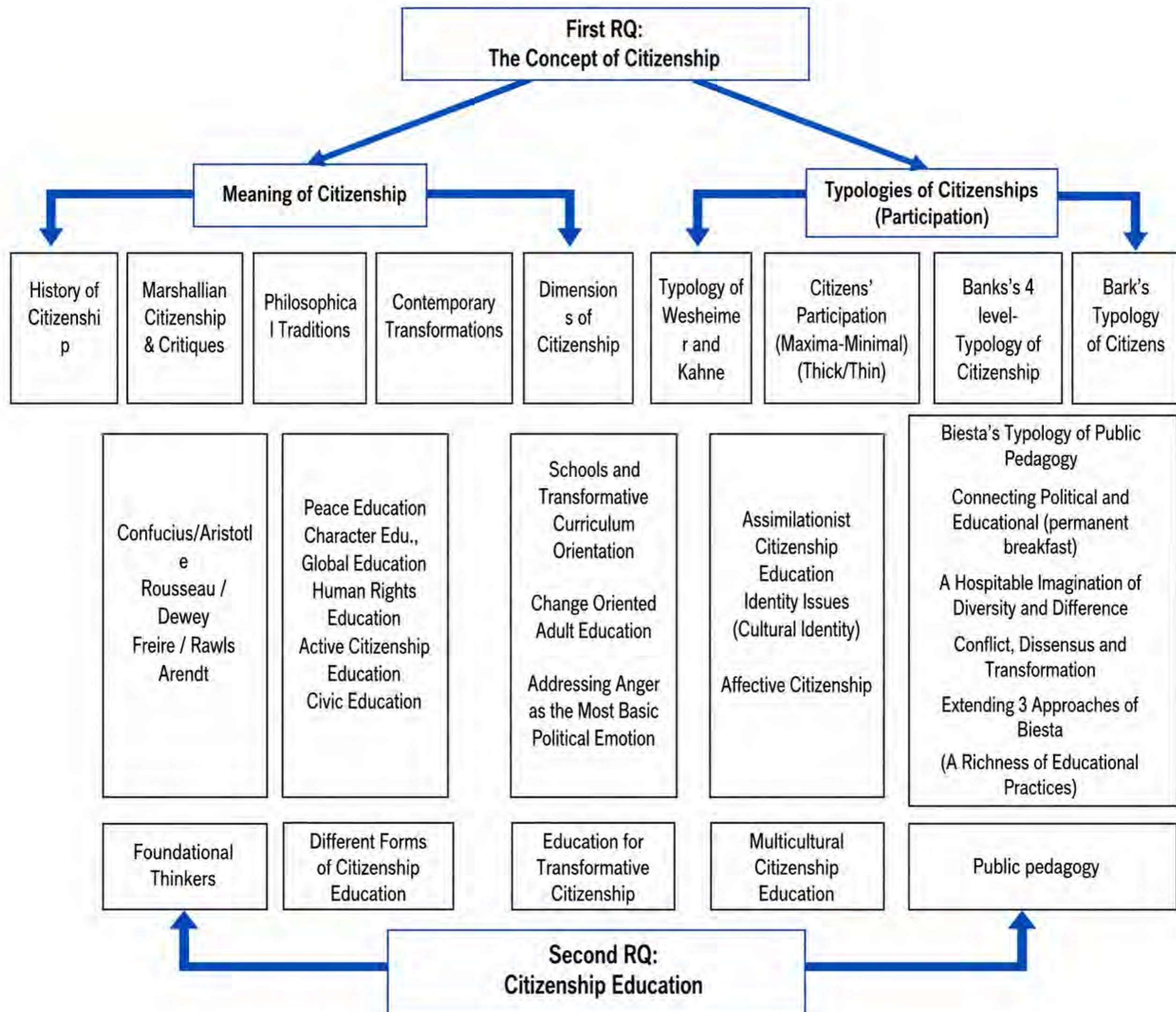


Figure 2: A summary of the analysis results: themes and sub-themes

3.1 Research question 1: Dimensions of citizenship

According to Marshall (1950, pp. 28-29) “Citizenship is a status bestowed on all those who are full members of a community. All those who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed.”

Understanding the criticisms and debates around this perception supports the efficient approach of the concept of citizenship. One influence has been the identification of the dimensions of citizenship based on the idea that citizenship is not only a certain status designated by a series of rights and responsibilities. Although citizenship is considered as a contested concept with different categorizations (Bloemraad, 2000; Stokke, 2017; Leydet, 2017) there are certain major component which define citizenship as a concept (Table 2).

Table 2. Dimensions of citizenship

Dimensions of citizenship	Descriptions and considerations
Membership and Identity	• Is integrated in communitarian ideas, that participation together for getting best political decisions for the collective is very essential to the creation of communal identity, consolidation of the concepts of citizenship and nationality: "nation" determines the meaning of the political community in a society. This is challenged by the question of immigrants' membership in the national community, as the identity dimension of citizenship. • Discussions on differentiated citizenship or multicultural citizenship challenge both the communitarian and liberal approach. • Identity dimension is the most complicated (relevant to social integration and the citizens' subjective sense of belonging, the "psychological" dimension, and influences "the political community's collective identity".
Legal Status	• In a very basic view, citizenship is a condition which designates a legal status by one State to an individual (nominal citizenship), which leads to rights and to commitments. • It challenges the division between citizens and non-citizens and the issue of equality among citizens. • Migration challenges the traditional view and the simple relationship between individuals and the state: not just one citizenship for everyone.
Rights	• Is associated with membership and formal citizenship. • Has the threefold of civil, political, and social rights • Migration challenges the association of rights and citizenship (global human rights and the denial of rights to non-citizen and its consequences).
Participation	• Citizenship includes responsibilities, in the form of obligatory taxes or military service, for instance. • Participation in the communitarian approach is called "active citizenship", which is about pulling people out of the private sphere into the public sphere. • Political dimension of citizenship: citizens as "political agents actively participate in a society's political institutions". • The view that nation-state is the point of attention in participatory citizenship, is challenged by immigration: people are engaged in many activities in other various spaces, like their host country or international networks - "transnational participation"

The definition of citizenship can be conveyed in a clearer way by the conceptual map below (Bloemraad, 2000).

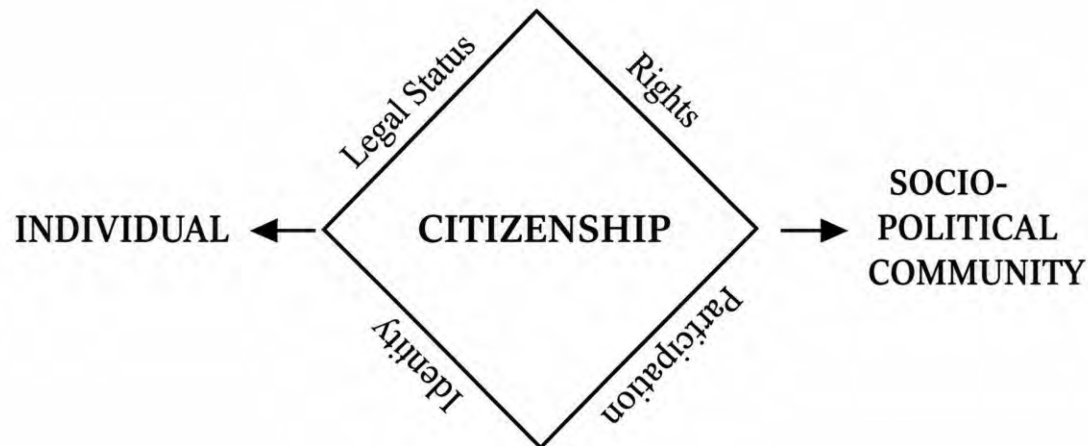
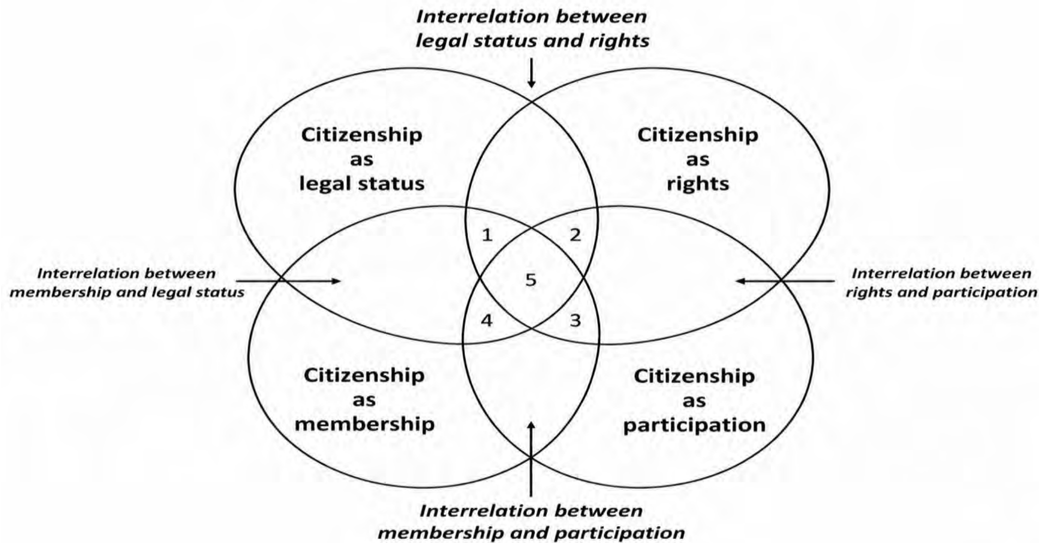


Figure 3: A Conceptual Map of Citizenship (Bloemraad, 2000)

In addition, studies shows that the relations between the dimensions of citizenship are complex (Leydet, 2017; Stokke 2017). While the modern citizenship can be perceived as a four-dimensional interconnected concept, "stratified citizenship' may also, emerge from a deficit in any of these dimensions. Status of full citizenship would be developed only if the four dimensions are fulfilled for a citizen.

This perception of citizenship as being "partial and stratified, despite the emphasis on universality and equality within the liberal model", has absorbed raised attention in current decades in the frameworks of "globalization, international migration and changing forms of governance" (Stokke, 2017, p.198) and has led to transformations in citizenship studies in the contemporary world including the cultural and the global turns.



Stratified citizenship

1. Membership, legal status and rights without participation (politically excluded citizens)
2. Legal status, rights and participation without membership (culturally excluded citizens)
3. Membership, rights and participation without legal status (juridically excluded residents)
4. Membership, legal status and participation without rights (socially excluded citizens)
5. Membership, legal status, rights and participation (full citizens)

Figure 4: Dimensions and Stratifications of Citizenship (Stokke, 2017)

3.2 Typologies for citizenship as a base for defining the aims and methods of citizenship education

The expectation on the kind of citizens a society aims to have been determinative in planning the goals for citizenship education. Typologies for citizenship not only addresses the meaning and definition of citizenship but also links the concept of “citizenship” to “education for citizenship”. According to our review and analysis on the citizenship typologies existing in the literature also analysing them based on the importance of the conceptualization of citizenship (Chapter 3.1), we suggest that Banks (2017b) typology of citizenship can be considered as the most comprehensive

aligned with the concept of citizenship in all its dimensions, and it can serve as a theoretical foundation for research and planning in the field of citizenship and citizenship education.

As Banks explains, “failed citizenship” can be perceived as an experience by “marginalized and structurally excluded ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, and religious groups”. What creates these kinds of experiences, is that “many of the rights of full citizenship” are not withheld for this group. The result is the development of “complex identities and ambivalent attachments to the nation-state" which might lead to low level participation in the political system (Banks, 2017b, p. 67). Then as the opposite of this, “Individuals and groups that are recognized citizens are structurally integrated into the nation-state, have strong identifications with it, are recognized and validated as citizens, and have the opportunity to fully participate in the polity” (Banks, 2017b, p. 67). Finally, in “transformative citizenship” citizens step in to make real “values and moral principles that transcend the nation-states and national boundaries, such as the values that are articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that were articulated and promoted by civil and human rights leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela" (Banks, 2017b, p. 69).

One important point in this typology is that the three first types of citizens can all take transformative actions to make paramount modifications within the nation that advance social justice and equality.

What follows are the results of our analysis of different typologies of citizenship:

Firstly, this typology addresses the complexity of the concept of citizenship and the interrelatedness which might exist between various categories of citizenship, more than the other ones. Secondly, the typology starts with the conception of “failed citizenship” as one of the categories. In other forms of typologies mentioned above, any category like this cannot be found. For example, in three kinds of citizenship framework of Westheimer and Kahne the first level is about personally responsible citizens. That is while if there is failed citizenship then there would be a danger of not even acting as a personally responsible citizen. Thinking about failed citizenship, therefore, leads to thinking about other reasons for the problem of non-participation rather than the individual’s lack of knowledge, skill, or responsibility. Thirdly, in the second category, recognized citizenship, there is again an insistence on the critical role of the nation-state. Banks (2017b, pp. 369-370) clarifies:

> Individuals and groups who experience failed citizenship may become recognized citizens if the polity provides them with increased recognition and structural inclusion. …. However, it does not guarantee their participation, and individuals or groups who have state-recognized citizenship status participate in politics at very different levels.

So, the level of participation for a citizen with recognized citizenship status could be so that the individual is participating at the personally responsible level (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003) or minimal level (Banks, 2014) or could be placed at the participatory citizenship of this category.

To emphasis and illustrate the comprehensiveness of this typology we have visualized Banks's 4-level category of citizenship below. What we could distinguish in this category as a very valuable point regarding our research questions is that all the four dimensions of citizenship can be seen in this category (figure 2). This visualization can provide a perception on how the concept of citizenship with its four dimensions can be related to the concept of citizenship education with Bank's latest typology.

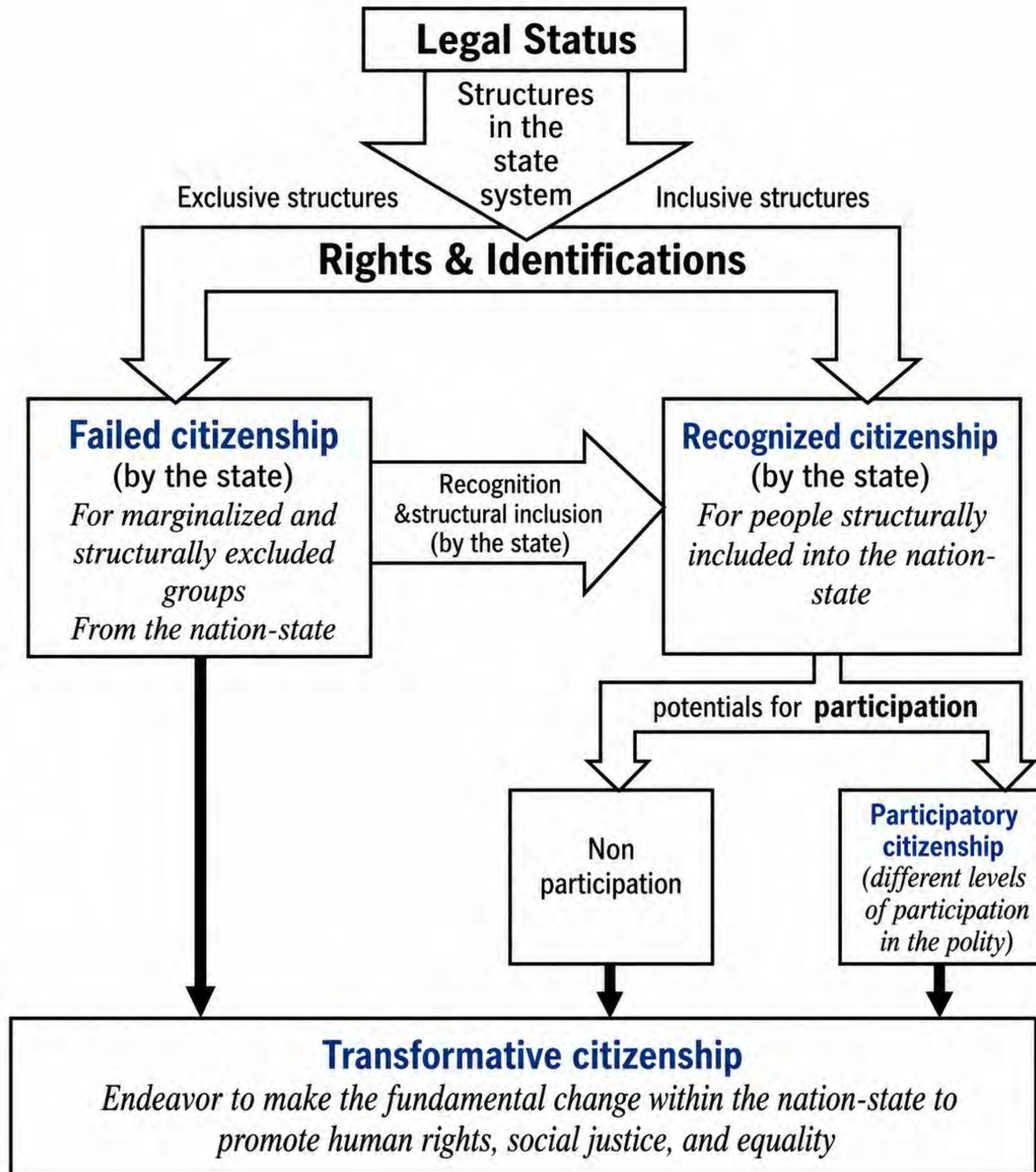


Figure 5: Visualization of Banks's typology of citizenship:

failed, recognized, participatory, and transformative.

3.3 Research question 2: Different definitions and models of citizenship education

According to our review character education, peace education, global education, human rights education, civic education and education for active citizenship are introduced in the literature as different forms of citizenship education. Apart from these, we recognized three forms that can provide major implications when thinking about education for democratic citizenship considering the newcomers.

1. **Education for transformative citizenship**

Regarding the fact that a society requires transformative citizens to be directed towards social justice and democracy (Banks, 2017b; Westheimer & Kahne, 2003) a major question would be what are the ways for advancing transformative citizenship?

Transformative citizenship education is linked to radical, transformative and radical education theories (Freire, Mezirow etc,), which we place in this article under a unifying concept change-oriented adult education (Manninen, Jetsu & Sgier, 2019). As Freire (1972) pointed out, all education is political, either aiming for 'liberation' or 'domestication'. Picon (1991) defines a bit similar political aims for education: (1) maintenance and conservation of the traditional ordering of the society, (2) peaceful reform to improve the society, or (3) radical structural transformation. Mainstream nonformal adult education focus mostly on the first goal; Manninen (2017, pp 332-334) shows that 90 % of the nonvocational nonformal courses (f = 14 063) adults (n = 8 646) in 10 European countries had participated during the past 12 months were aiming at maintenance and conservation of the traditional order of society. Only 10 % of the courses had the political aim 2, trying to peacefully improve society. Courses aiming at radical structural change were not found (but see the discussion in Manninen, 2017, pp. 334-337).

Martin (2003, p. 66) declares that "the primary discourse of lifelong learning is political rather than educational since education on its own can do little to ensure that such structural change takes place". He invites the educators to reassess the politics of citizenship, which has always been at the heart of the radical project in AE, and to talk in a discriminating and purposeful way about 'learning', with a crucial dialectic between the economic, social, and democratic imperatives" (Martin, 2003, p. 77). He asserts that "Lifelong learning enables the deconstruction of welfare to be affected through the reconstruction of citizenship by moving towards a more equitable distribution of material and cultural resources among citizens". By connecting this argument to the enhancement of sense of agency as the feature of real citizenship also the major objective of AE, he justifies that sometimes this agency is articulated by anger since there is no other way for its expression. Martin asserts that anger "is certainly a problem for democracy, but it is also a possibility". He considers dissent and even anger as "a key civic virtue in a democracy" which is called by Pierre Bourdieu as "legitimate rage" and criticizes that "government's citizenship agenda"

for not addressing a great deal of ‘legitimate rage’ which is already around and not making the most of it”. Anger as “the most basic political emotion” without which there would be no ‘hope’ also as he states, “making anger hopeful is an educational task” (Martin, 2003, p. 75).

Evans (2008, pp. 519-521) refers to Miller‘s curriculum orientations and state that in transformative orientation knowledge is built in relation to “the political, cultural, historical, and social aspects of their society, and teacher is presenting a role as of the guide and facilitator”, assessment activities intend to estimate “personal growth and integration and social awareness”, and spaces for “self-evaluation and reflective journals and portfolios” are provided (Evans, 2008, P. 24).

In addition, Banks (2017b) suggests actual teaching methods that can be employed to advance transformative citizenship including Culturally Responsive and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, Civic Action Programs (participatory action research, service learning etc.) and Ethnic Studies Teaching. Through this, schools can lessen failed citizenship and make students able “to acquire structural inclusion, political efficacy, and civic action skills" (Banks, 2017b, p. 72). These considerations in fact declare the importance of multicultural education.

2. Multicultural citizenship education

The notion of multicultural education was formed because of “the ethnic movements of the 1960s and 1970s” which greatly questioned the assimilationist conception of citizenship education” (Banks et al., 2005, p. 1). Different scholars called the process of assimilation as “deculturation” or “subtractive schooling “. Banks justifies that as the result of the self-alienation which happens in assimilation, the individuals perceive themselves as “structurally excluded” within the nation-state and will not be successful in internalizing the values of the nation-state either. Banks calls this as the phenomenon of “failed citizenship” (Banks, 2017b, p. 69). According to Banks, this phenomenon is created due to a problem in identity formation. He refers to Kylmicka and indicates that “students from cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religiously diverse communities will find it difficult to develop strong commitments and identities with the nation-state if it does not reflect and incorporate important aspects of their ethnic and community cultures”. Aligned with this argument scholars suggests a conceptualization of “cultural identity, national identity, and global identity” which need to be seen “highly interconnected, complex, changing, and contextual” (Banks, 2012, p. 69), a need to development of ”a more sophisticated understanding of the complexities of formation and performance of identities, especially in light of globalization and increasing migration” (Gholami, 2017, p. 98) – for which the typology for the “Stages of Cultural Identity” (Banks, 2008, pp. 4-65) can be a proper example – also the necessity of extending citizenship education to contain “cultural rights for citizens from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, and language groups“ (Delanty, 2003, p. 00). Banks explains that how “a delicate balance of diversity and unity is an essential goal of multicultural nations and of teaching and learning in societies in which equality and social justice are major aims” (Banks, 2008, p. 9). Banks asserts that through citizenship education the students should be helped to recognize that they require “to

participate in ways that will enhance democracy and promote equality and social justice in their cultural communities, nations, regions, and in the world" (Banks, 2012, p. 71). A very essential concern with this regard is paying attention to the role of affections and emotions in citizenship formation. For instance, Zembylas (2020, p. p. 23) discusses "the concept of affective citizenship and its potential contribution to citizenship education discourses, especially in the context of multicultural societies" and suggest to enrich the "framework for critical citizenship education" by holding the "rational" and the "affective" connected together instead of as a dichotomy. Furthermore, he feelings of belonging which are integrated in citizenship experiences "need to be understood within the context of specific emotional geographies and locations" (Wood, 2018, p. 15).

3. Public pedagogy

Our literature review shows that in addition to transformative and multicultural education, public pedagogy largely contributes to the advancement of democratic citizenship. O'Malley et al. (2020) define public pedagogy as a theoretical concept about forms, processes, and sites of education and learning which take place beyond schooling. Biesta (2012, p. 91) by applying the Arendt's thoughts of political action seeks for the potential of education in supporting the advancement of those shapes of "human action through which freedom can appear". He suggests a differentiation between three forms of interpretation of public pedagogy which provides an "active and programmatic understanding" for it. The table below shows a summary of Biesta's typology of public pedagogy.

Table 3: Summary of the characteristics and outcomes of Biesta's three approaches to public pedagogy

approaches to public pedagogy	characteristics	outcomes
pedagogy for the public	World is like a huge school, and responsibility of the educational agents" is to tell the people in society what to think, how to act and, perhaps most importantly, what to be	deletion of plurality and difference, human togetherness in which freedom can appear would be eliminated, greatly differs from the logic of democracy
pedagogy of the public	pedagogy in terms of learning a shift from instruction to conscientization, pedagogue is a facilitator	democracy "under a 'regime' of learning, that they need to learn and must learn to become (better) political actors by right, correct or true understandings, still willing to maintain the logic of schooling
pedagogy for the publicness (pedagogy for becoming public)	public pedagogue doesn't instruct nor facilitates but interrupts	concern for the public quality of human togetherness and thus for the possibility of actors and events to become public, freedom can appear

Biesta declares that by delving into the Arendt's ideas around the concepts of “action, freedom and plurality” and their interconnectedness, we can perceive a very significant lesson which can support us in understanding the concept of public sphere and it is that reducing plurality and homogenizing or purifying public spaces would result in “the eradication of the very conditions under which action is possible and freedom can appear”. He declares his ambition “to articulate a notion of public pedagogy that connects the political and educational and locates both firmly in the public domain-and suggests “the pedagogy for the publicness” as the one which can make open the “opportunities for becoming public”; the chances which can lead to human togetherness and preserve pluralism and democracy (Biesta, 2012, pp. 86-689).

Käpplinger (2018) pondering Biesta’s thoughts states that approaching “education for the public” as “a deficit approach” and viewing “the education for the publicness” as the “most valuable contribution” is a simple classification. He also points to the necessity of existing “a variety and plurality in the educational work” and suggests adding three dimensions to this typology which involves the target groups of such practices: refugees, non-refugees and a mixed group of refugees and non-refugees at the same time (Käpplinger, 2018, pp. 174-175).

The recognition of the importance of diversity and difference for the promotion of democracy encourages scholars to seek principles based on which the ways and educational methods for supporting and advancing plurality are realized. Relevant to this we found the discussions by Todd (2008), Biesta (2012), Wildemeersch (2017), Käpplinger (2018) and Choo (2020), as useful data to finalise the answer to our second research question. Description of the analysis is behind the scope of this article; however, the figure below illustrates the summary of the findings on what can be effective while thinking about pedagogy for publicness and will provide references for the methods and theories that can be used promoting democratic citizenship.

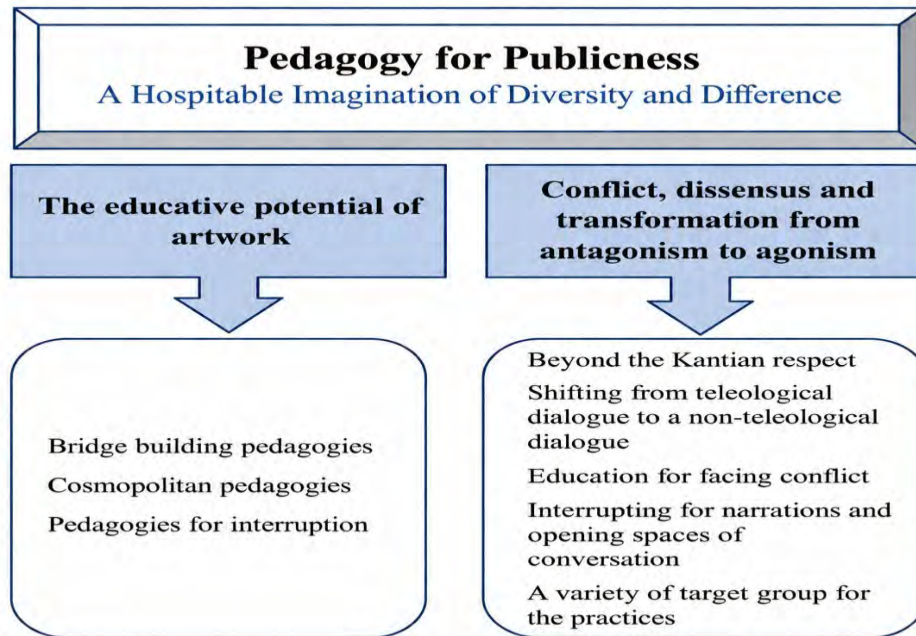


Figure 6: Summary of analysis of the research findings on contributors to the pedagogy for publicness

4 Discussion

According to the findings relevant to the meaning of citizenship, it is essential to include all the four dimensions of citizenship as legal status, rights, participation, and identity, because they are interconnected. It is also important to address different levels of citizenship such as local, national, regional, and global. Any gap in one of these dimensions and levels would lead to a deficit approach to citizenship as a multilayer and multilevel concept. These considerations need to be applied to the studies and plans related to citizenship education, too.

When doing research on the participation dimension of citizenship, it is necessary to think about more creative practices like transformative citizenship, which would probably lead to more participation in the polity in a longer period. Immigrants might need to learn first about the importance of these practices and then about the concrete ways for these practices, since many of them are not adequately aware of the roles they could have as citizens in making things different in democratic societies. Change oriented adult education can foster this goal very well.

Different scholars have accentuated the importance of emotions and affects in the formation of belonging and identity, and thus in citizenship behaviours, while stating that this significance has been neglected (Zembylas, 2020; Wildemeersch, 2017; Wood, 2018). This would emphasize the necessity of studying the concept of citizenship within the context of political affects (Clough et. al., 2007). One problem is that many studies have supposed that legal status comprises belonging, while belonging is also formed and influenced by affective features (Zhu, 2015). In advancing

research for the issue of identity and belonging it should be noted that “status is about being a full member of a community, while identity is about feeling like a member of that particular community” (Schugurensky, cited in Zhu, 2015). Zhu (2015, p. 3) states that it is even possible that “a new vocabulary of citizenship would be needed and created to describe spatial, relational and emotional dimensions of citizenship.

We suggest considering the conceptualization of citizenship based on the four dimensions of citizenship, and use of Banks’s framework of four levels of citizenship as two ideal types. Ideal types according to Max Weber can be used as an “analytic tool” and as a “reflective tool”. They don’t need to always stem from observable reality and can be based on “theoretical- historical debates” (Cohen, 2010, p. 9).

The concept of “stratified citizenship” defined by Stokke (2017) is a good reminder for the importance of addressing all dimensions of citizenship when talking about the concept of citizenship with a focus on participation. In addition, typology of citizenship by Banks (2017a) is a good tool in addressing different dimensions of citizenship while thinking about citizenship education. Since four types of citizenship specified can be used in interpreting the “civic behaviour” of any group including “marginalized and minoritized ethnic groups” who might experience the condition of failed citizenship (Banks, 2017b, p. 66), it can be considered as one of the best typologies relevant to immigrants. Our visualization of this typology of citizenship provides a useful framework for discussion and research on the topic (Figure 2).

Transformative education and multicultural education can largely influence citizenship education in both contexts of schools and adult education. Transformative citizenship education “challenges liberal assimilationist conceptions of citizenship” (Zembylas, 2020, p. 27). It contributes to the identity dimension of citizenship by recognizing cultural values and norms of immigrants, to rights as another dimension of citizenship by encouraging them to distinguish the inequalities in the structures of the society and to claim for their rights, also to the participation dimension of citizenship by inviting people to take action against the inequalities and letting them be active citizens even if they don’t prefer to participate in the polity by voting in the elections. It can even influence the legal status of non-citizens by addressing inequalities and human rights. Thus, this approach is very attentive to the concept of citizenship as an ideal. Human rights education and global education can be addressed well in this approach and as a result the hybrid identities and multilevel conception of citizenship could be supported.

There are many ways how multicultural education can contribute to the identity dimension of citizenship. This contributes also the participation dimension of citizenship, since when people can make the right identifications psychologically, they can see themselves more as a member of their societies and have the motivation to participate more.

We suppose that multicultural education can also promote the well-being of families -- which according to Fejes (2019, p. 34) is one of the major goals of adult education -- by reducing the family conflicts resulting from the faster socialization of youth comparing to their parents. In addition, it can create more motivation for parents to be active participants in society rather than

passive citizens whose main function is the provision of low-level support for the lives of their children.

Finally, when it comes to public pedagogy, there are many invaluable provisions for adult education. Biesta's typology of public pedagogy is very beneficial as it directs our attentions to the various hierarchical insights which might be hidden in our minds on immigrants' citizenship education, also how we might underestimate them and how we would put the burden on their shoulders while planning the citizenship education programs.

Käpplinger's idea on valuing also the two other types of pedagogy (pedagogy for the public and pedagogy of the public), and his suggestion on the extension of Biesta's typology of public pedagogy by adding three dimensions for the target groups is a valuable tool in program planning. It supports inclusion and democratic citizenship (in its different dimensions) by upholding the idea that "education takes place not only in relation to migrants, but also to the wider public and the societal majority" and encouraging the encounters between immigrants and newcomers which reduces xenophobia as a barrier of inclusion (Käpplinger, 2018, p.173-176). Another important consideration is who should take on the roles of teachers and tutors. This aspect also calls for creativity. Depending on the pedagogy and structure of the program, teachers and tutors can come from diverse groups—such as immigrants as well as non-immigrants.

Such approaches can help advance what Wildemeersch (2017) describes as "opening spaces of conversation" fostering dialogue in multiple ways and creating opportunities for a plurality of voices within these programs. It also supports the development of citizenship by encouraging participation, dialogue, and shared responsibility among all participants.

All these elements contribute significantly to mutuality, which is a critical dimension of meaningful integration. Thinking about program planning for citizenship education, program analysis should be used to describe and analyse the contents and rationale of citizenship education programs for immigrants, as suggested and done by Käpplinger (2018). As he states, there is a gap in research done with this method. Program analysis studies can help policy makers and educators to assess the status quo of the practiced programs.

All suggestions based on this literature review require to consider adult education beyond the lifelong learning policies and practices which represent "hegemonic view of adult education, which reduces citizenship education to "worker and consumer education"" (Lucio-Villegas, 2017, p. 52). In addition, it is important to remember that "politics of citizenship" have always been a major concern for "radical adult education", and educators need to accept the challenge to engage in policies and politics and acknowledge that politics matters (Martin, 2003, p. 77).

References

Banks, J. (2017a). Citizenship education and global migration: implications for theory, research, and teaching. American Educational Research Association.

Banks, J. (2017b). Failed Citizenship and Transformative Civic Education. Educational Researcher, 46(7), 366–377. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X17726741

Biesta, G. (2012). Becoming public: public pedagogy, citizenship and the public sphere. Social & Cultural Geography, 13, 683 - 697. Bloemraad, I. (2000). Citizenship and immigration a current review. Journal of International Migration and Integration, 1(1), 9–37. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-000-1006-4

Borhan, H. (2025), “Civic education as a pathway to inclusive societies: Exploring the role of education in fostering civic and social engagement”, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 326, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/3f128be8-en

Brubaker, R. (1992). Citizenship and nationhood in Germany and France. Cambridge, Mass.

Clough, Patricia Ticineto & Halley, Janet (eds.). The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social. Duke University Press, 2007

Delanty, G. (2003). Citizenship as a learning process: Disciplinary citizenship versus cultural citizenship. Int. of Lifelong Education, 22(6), 597-605.

Delgado-Algarra, E., Bernal-Bravo, C., & López-Meneses, E. (2019). Multicultural competence and cosmopolitan citizenship in the Hispanic-Japanese context of Higher Education. Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research (NAER Journal), 8(2), 166-183.

Fejes, A. (2018). Adult education and the fostering of asylum seekers as “full” citizens. International Review of Education, 1-18.

Evans, M. (2008). Citizenship education, pedagogy and school contexts. The SAGE handbook of education for citizenship and democracy, 519-532.

Gholami, R. (2017). The art of self-making: identity and citizenship education in late modernity. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 38(6), 798-811.

Joppke, C. (2010). The Inevitable Lightening of Citizenship. European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv Für Soziologie, 51(1), 9–32. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23998855

Käpplinger, B. (2018). Addressing refugees and non-refugees in adult education programs: A longitudinal analysis on shifting public concerns. European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, 9(2), 161–177. https://doi.org/10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela242

Leydet, D, "Citizenship", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL =. Marshall, T. H. 1950{1964} Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays.

Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press. {This work was later published in 1964 as Class Citizenship and Social Development, 1964, London: Heinemann}

Manninen, J. (2017). Empirical and genealogical analysis of non-vocational adult education in Europe. International review of education, 63(3), 319-340.

Manninen, J., Jetsu, A., & Sgier, I. (2019). Change-oriented adult education in the fields of democracy and digitalization. FutureLabAE Project Intellectual output O1. Brussels: EAEA. https://eaea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FutureLabAE_updatedversion2.pdf

Marshall, T. H. 1950{1964} Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press. {This work was later published in 1964 as Class Citizenship and Social Development, 1964, London: Heinemann}.

Martin, I. (2003). Adult education, lifelong learning and citizenship: Some ifs and buts. Int. of Lifelong Education, 22(6), 566-579.

Nagel, Caroline. "Questioning Citizenship in an" Age of Migration." Globalization and its Outcomes (2004): 231-252.

O'Malley, M. P., Sandlin, J. A., & Burdick, J. (2020). Public pedagogy theories, methodologies, and ethics. In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education.

Picon, C. (1991). Adult education and popular education in the context of state and NGOs. Convergence, 24(1/2), 80–92.

Stokke, K. (2017). Politics of citizenship: Towards an analytical framework. Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift, 71(4),193–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/00291951.2017.1369454

Todd, S. (2008). Democracy, education and conflict: Rethinking respect and the place of the ethical. Journal of Educational Controversy, 3(1), 1-11.

Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2003). What kind of citizen? Political choices and educational goals. Encounters in Theory and History of Education, 4. https://doi.org/10.24908/eoe-eserse.v4i0.658

Wildemeersch, D. (2017). Opening spaces of conversation: Citizen education for newcomers as a democratic practice. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 36(1/2), 112–128. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2016.1254435

Wood, B. E., & Black, R. (2018). Spatial, relational and affective understandings of citizenship and belonging for young people today: Towards a new conceptual framework. Interrogating belonging for young people in schools, 165-185.

Zembylas, M. (2020). Affective Citizenship and Education in Multicultural Societies: Tensions, Ambivalences, and Possibilities. In The Palgrave Handbook of Citizenship and Education (pp. 923–935). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67828-3_2

Zhu, Y. (2015). Brokering identity and learning citizenship: Immigration settlement organizations and new Chinese immigrants in Canada. JSSE-Journal of Social Science Education, 9-19.